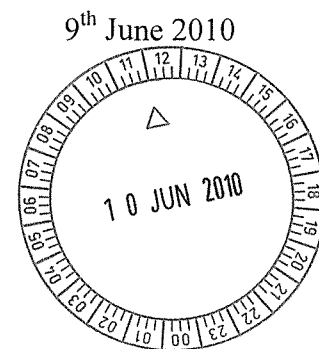




**Locked Bag 14  
Cloisters Square  
WA 6850**

Hon. Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA  
Minister for Education; Tourism  
19th Floor  
Governor Stirling Tower  
197 St Georges Terrace  
Perth WA 6000

Email: Minister.Constable@dpc.wa.gov.au



**Re: Loss of year 11 and 12 programs in District High Schools in country regions of WA**

*And*

**Department of Education's move to charge schools who access programs with the  
School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE)**

Dear Minister

I would like to begin our submission by giving you some background into our organisation before proceeding to discuss two education issues that are related, in that both deal with limiting students' educational choices within the government school system.

The Consumers' Association of Western Australia Inc. (CAWA) was established in 1974 to provide consumer representation to business and government. Our main objectives are to:

- represent the views of consumers in Western Australia
- investigate and act on issues of concern to consumers
- provide a forum for the discussion of matters of common interest to consumers
- encourage consumer education.

As a consumer advocacy organisation we promote the **United Nations 8 Basic Consumer Rights which include:**

2. The right to be informed - To be given facts needed to make an informed choice;
3. The right to choose - To be able to select from a range of products and services;
5. The right to satisfaction of basic needs - To have access to basic essential goods and services, adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, **education** and sanitation.

Locked Bag 14, Cloisters Square WA 6850

President: Genette Keating PO Box 5466 CANNING VALE SOUTH WA 6155  
Secretary: Verity Cripps 97 Glengarriff Drive FLOREAT WA 6014

Mob: 0419 943 707  
Ph: 9387 4108

Information about the **first issue: Loss of year 11 and 12 programs in District High Schools in country regions of WA** was taken from a news broadcast at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/audio/2010/03/16/2847020.htm> (posted March 16, 2010 and accessed June 2, 2010). In this program you clearly state that this decision has been made to give students better educational outcomes because the current scenario where a school provides programs for fewer than ten students has limited opportunities. You then go on to outline the three future options students will have:

1. travel by bus to the nearest senior high school;
2. a boarding arrangement at one of the nine regional hostels or the City Beach hostel in the metropolitan area (noting that the Barnett Government cut funding to Swanleigh Residential College in December 2009, and the College currently only has a commitment to remain open until the end of 2010);
3. staying on at the District High School, but enrolling with the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE), with some support from the DHS.

Opposing the first option, the Nationals MP Grant Woodham has said 'this is not always reasonable' since some students would be travelling 'over 200 kilometres a day'. His comments can be found at: [http://www.optuszoo.com.au/regional\\_news/113420/wheatbelt/district-high-schools-lose-senior-year-courses.html](http://www.optuszoo.com.au/regional_news/113420/wheatbelt/district-high-schools-lose-senior-year-courses.html) (posted 16 Mar, 2010 accessed 3 June, 2010).

This view is also supported by the article in the *Kimberley Echo* on the 15 April 2010, which reported that the option one scenario, transporting students from Wyndham to Kununurra in 2009 by bus has not been successful, and the bus, at a tax payer cost of \$511,000 over two years, is at times empty because the 1000 km a week trip is too onerous for students. The article indicates that the Wyndham students of senior school age are currently not attending school. The article, '1000km too much for remote student', featured in *The West Australian* on June 7, 2010, page 11 further supports this opinion, relating the experience of one Wyndham based year 12 student who has quit school after six months of tiring travel.

Both options 1 and 2 have a social cost to small rural communities. They will diminish teaching expertise and resources in local schools. It follows that the programs that can be offered to lower school years are also reduced. Given DHS are hubs within their communities, there is a flow on effect that will diminish entire districts already at risk from reduced infrastructure in health, banking etc. The second option, removing young people from their communities is also likely to exacerbate the general exodus of young people and further contribute to the depletion of WA's rural population. The *October 1998, Summary report of consultations undertaken for the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC)*, prepared by Dr Anne Butorac AAAJ Consulting Group cites the single most important issue raised by respondents was that of staffing – approximately 33.3% of the discussion involved staffing matters but also of major importance were the issues of students having to move away from their communities.

Regarding the third choice, CAWA has received information indicating that the last option is the one that in fact has currently been operating within many of these DHS. It seems that these schools have been delivering curriculum in a partnership arrangement with SIDE since

the school leaving age was raised in 2006. Perusal of the electronic handbook on the SIDE website indicates that there are a wide range of courses available, including both vocational and WACE subjects. However CAWA has also been informed that far from promoting the third option, the Department of Education has taken steps to actively discourage it as a viable choice. We understand the supervision support for students in most DHS is being progressively reduced in 2010 meaning duty of care, student safety and education opportunities such as internet use have been compromised, making it difficult for DHS to offer SIDE courses to students. We understand that funds for supervision support and curriculum access will not be provided at all in 2011.

Currently, there is another cohort of year 8-12 students who are enrolled at remote community schools and small primary schools, studying through distance learning. It is CAWA's understanding that a similar partnership agreement exists with SIDE and that the educational future of these students may also be under scrutiny by the Department of Education (DoE). It would seem that all the issues also apply to these schools and students.

It must also be noted that the alternative of students remaining in their communities and enrolling with SIDE as home based students would disadvantage some students significantly – particularly those who do not have access to telephones, facsimile machines and computers and whose parents are unable to actively support their children's learning as supervisors. Many indigenous students fall into this category.

From web based searches, there appears to be very little information in the public arena about these changes or the policy which has been implemented very quietly, without community consultation. The WA Labor Party has condemned the policy as a cost cutting exercise, and it is difficult to visualise it as anything else, given the lack of information and open debate.

It would seem that the third option – a staffed and resourced DHS, working in tandem with SIDE would give the best educational outcomes for students. This thinking is borne out by DoE research. The *Review of the Operations of District High Schools in Western Australia* produced by Dr K W Evans (2004) states:

- 'District high schools are very important institutions in declining rural communities'.
- 'More deliberate use could be made of SIDE. Experience shows that SIDE material is most effectively used in schools in dual-mode delivery, that is, where there is a teacher (though not necessarily a teacher of that subject) present with the student at all times for motivation, discipline, organisational assistance and to help with general questions'.
- 'Resource allocation has to be on the basis of what is necessary to enable the educational program to be taught successfully rather than on a strict application of a formula, even if this appears to be over-resourcing'.

CAWA urges the Minister to rethink the current DoE policy. Funding decisions should be made in the best interests of educational outcomes for students. It is a matter of equity that at risk WA country students should be given the option of remaining in their school of choice and be provided with appropriate subject choices and assistance so that they are able to realise their career goals. Surely we should honour the fact that the wealth in our buoyant economy comes from our rural mining and agricultural industries by committing to an infrastructure to support the country people who provide it.

**The second issue: The Department of Education's move to charge schools who access programs with the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE)** surfaced as CAWA was considering the former issue and it seems that there are similar equity issues. From the newspaper article, '\$1000 school fee hits students', The West Australian, 27 May, 2010 and information posted on the ALP website at <http://www.wa.alp.org.au/news/0510/27-07.php> (posted 27 May, 2010 accessed 3 June, 2010), it appears that both country and city senior high schools are now to be charged by DoE, approximately \$1000 per enrolled student accessing SIDE courses because these students are regarded as being funded twice – once at their local school and then through SIDE. One country high school, Northam Senior High School was sent a bill for \$35,456.40.

Michelle Roberts MLA, Shadow Minister for Education stated, 'the new charge for SIDE courses will put a disproportionate burden on country schools and schools in lower socio economic areas'.

The implication for 2011 and beyond is that schools will no longer use SIDE as the loss of funds currently used for supervising students undertaking SIDE courses and the provision of the necessary technological resources will no longer be available. The subject choices of WA government school students, particularly country students, will become further restricted, resulting in an increasing disparity in education between large and small schools; and country and city schools.

The report into Funding And Secondary School Choice In Australia: A Historical Consideration, Rosemary Cahill (Department of Education, Western Australia) and Jan Gray (Edith Cowan University) (published February 2010, accessed on 2 June 2010) <http://ajte.education.ecu.edu.au/issues/PDF/351/Cahill.pdf> deals primarily with choices between government and non-government schools, however the following concluding quote seems to apply:

'Research shows, however, that the extent to which choices are available to parents is unevenly distributed (Cahill, 2009). Parents with limited means have limited choices while those with significant means have far more choice (Cannold, 2007; DES, 2001; Kelley & Evans, 2004; Mukherjee, 1999). It follows that some children get a lot more of what their parents want for them, while other children are left to make the most of what their parents can get.'

CAWA urges the Minister to rescind the DoE decision to charge schools who access SIDE's programs on the basis of the following quote, taken from SIDE's website [http://www.side.wa.edu.au/side\\_story.html](http://www.side.wa.edu.au/side_story.html) (accessed 6 June 2010):

'The physical size and vastness of Western Australia, and the relatively small population with its concentration around the coast, creates some problems of economies of scale for the delivery of education and training to remote areas. Access and equity for all students has in recent years formed part of the state educational agenda designed to meet the needs of a small number of Australians who, either by choice or because of necessity, must live in very isolated conditions.'

It is CAWA's view that the same funding formulas cannot be applied to all situations if West Australian's want an equitable education system that gives all students' choices and good educational outcomes.

Finally it should be noted that the State Government strategy to improve attendance in public schools, launched on 31 May, 2010 <http://wa.gov.au/whatsnew/> (accessed 5 June 2010) is more likely to be successful if students have access to relevant curriculum choices.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Genette Keating  
President

Cc: Hon. Giz Watson MLC, Chair  
Legislative Council Estimates and Financial Operations Committee Inquiry into the Removal of Senior School Allocation Funding for Year 11 and 12 Courses at District High Schools

Cc: Hon. Michelle Roberts MLA  
Shadow Minister for Education