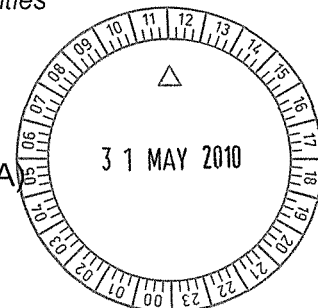




Isolated Children's Parents' Association of WA (Inc.,

*"Working together to gain access to choice of appropriate educational opportunities
for all rural and remote Western Australians."*



The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of WA Inc ICPA (WA)

response to the

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

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of WA ICPA (WA) represents over 300 rural and remote families throughout Western Australia and seeks to ensure that all students have access to a choice of appropriate educational opportunities that meet individual needs.

ICPA (WA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into the Removal of Senior School Allocation Funding for Year 11 and 12 Courses at District High Schools and wishes to make the following comments and observations;

a) Decision making process and rationale behind the decision

ICPA (WA) can not fully comment on the processes involved however we query the consultation and research undertaken and question the rationale behind the decision to no longer fund year 11 and 12 courses at District High Schools (DHS) particularly

when comments are made that *'the most appropriate schooling for students is through a senior high school and not a district high school'* (ABC News 16th March 2010).

Over the years there have been numerous reports and studies into rural and remote education in WA, including and not limited to the Tomlinson Report (1994), Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) Summary Report (October 1998) and Country Roads – Pathways to Better Education and Training for Rural and Remote Western Australia (2000-2003).

The research does not indicate that district high schools are unable to provide an appropriate delivery of service or that students are significantly better off by being transferred to senior high schools and there are no recommendations to this effect.

There is concern that by withdrawing access to the local school some students will not be provided with an educational program that is suitable for their particular circumstances and needs.

A bigger school does not mean bigger results.

b) the effect of the decision on the State Budget, the affected students and communities

The school is an important and integral part of every small rural community. It is anticipated that there will be flow on effects in these communities as families are faced with reduced schooling options for their children. Families may well decide to relocate rather than face the option of their children boarding away or travelling great distances to attend another school.

Students will be faced with the prospect of starting their final one or two years at a new school.

The effect this decision has on indigenous communities and families must also be seriously considered.

c) the adequacy, cost effectiveness and the social impact of the alternatives proposed

There will be cost and social impacts.

The three options that will be available to students who are currently accessing their senior years through the local DHS include;

- Travel to nearest Senior High School
- Attend a boarding facility
- Study through Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE)

Travelling to the nearest senior high school;

A major concern is the time and distances involved. Long days are not conducive to effective learning, cut into study time and act as a disincentive to attend school for some. Not all students can study whilst travelling.

Students' ability to be involved in after school sports or activities in their local home town may well be reduced due to the extra travelling time.

ICPA (WA) regularly hears from members about the constant problems and issues associated with bus runs and services. There is potential to add to these current pressures.

Example of where there has not been a positive outcome.
Wyndham DHS ceased offering senior years in 2009.

Parents say that the decision by the Department of Education to close Wyndham District High School at the start of 2009 has been a failure. Students now have to travel by bus to the Senior High School in Kununurra as the department stated that it would benefit the students by giving them access to bigger classes and more subject choices. Of the 10 students enrolled at the district high school last year only two have been catching the bus. The bus which costs taxpayers \$511,000 over two years under a Public Transport Authority contract has had to travel to Wyndham and back empty on many occasions. One parent stated that her daughter who travelled on the bus in year 11 felt too exhausted to keep doing it for year 12 as the daily 2.5 hour drive coupled with her daughter's part time work were too exhausting. It was impossible to find a boarding place for this young person in Kununurra and she has now moved interstate to finish her schooling. There are up to six Wyndham students who should be in years 11 and 12 and who are not.
(Kimberley Echo 15.04.2010)

What has happened to these students? What will happen to these students? Would it have been more cost effective and productive to have continued funding the courses for these students in their local environment enabling them to complete their compulsory years of schooling?

Attending a boarding facility;

Boarding away may not be an option for families. There are many reasons for not sending students away including financial, distances, social, and cultural. Not every family wants to send their child away to board. Not every child is suited to the boarding environment. The students attending a DHS have chosen not to take the path of boarding.

Whilst there are country hostels available most are at capacity and with the closure of the Anglican run Swanleigh Hostel there are few if any low fee accommodation options in the metropolitan area. This highlights the obvious and urgent need for a government run boarding facility in metropolitan area.

The option to board has always been available and some families do choose to do this and often for the very reasons that other families choose not to send their children away eg some students thrive in a larger and more social setting while others are more suited to the smaller and intensive one on one setting. It is about choice and meeting the child's needs.

Study via Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE);

Studying via SIDE at home is not a suitable option for many students. It requires adequate supervision within the home and working in isolation by the student. Lack of ability to supervise and assist the student due to work commitments of parents and language or skill barriers would impede the students learning. Reliable access to technology along with suitable hardware, software and other education related equipment are necessitates in order to be able to successful study via SIDE in the home environment.

A viable and effective option is the studying of SIDE subjects through the local school in what is termed as a 'dual mode delivery'.

SIDE provides high quality, wide ranging courses, educational support, ICT and these coupled with a supportive classroom setup through the DHS ensures the educational outcomes for these students is positive and fruitful.

Students studying via SIDE in the DHS setting have added resources and materials available to assist with their studies. The supervisor and classroom set up encourages motivation and organisation and allows for social interaction and peer support.

ICPA (WA) has been made aware that schools that are to continue to provide 11 and 12 subjects through SIDE will have to fund these courses from school budgets. At over a \$1000 per unit per student very few schools will be able to offer a full range of units which means students will again be forced to seek other options.

d) any other relevant matter

Communication

Information was initially not clear and transparent - One DHS was told in October 2009 it would not be continuing with year 11 and 12 courses in 2010. Whilst the decision was reversed, after much community backlash, the fact remains that parents were faced with the prospect of having to make hasty decisions and alternate plans in a very short time frame not to mention the effect it had on the students who were half way through courses.

There needs to be a return to more community consultation. The trend is emerging of very little consultation with stakeholders which would appear to go against the Department of Educations, Classroom First Strategy.

Collaboration and working with all stakeholders helps to ensure smooth transitions and many issues can be worked through, resolved and overcome at the local level. Rural communities are by nature strong and innovative being able to think outside the box in order to overcome obstacles. Working with these communities instead of dictating ensures productive outcomes. One size does not fit all.

The Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) has virtually been inactive since the current government took office. RREAC represents rural and remote education stakeholders and was established to provide advice to the Minister for Education on matters impacting on this educational sector. It should be more fully utilised.

Conclusion

It is imperative that all students in rural and remote areas have access to suitable and appropriate pathways that encourage and ensure, not detract or impede their educational opportunities and outcomes.

The Government has an obligation to ensure every student has the opportunity to achieve their potential. Removing the option to study at the local school is denying students that opportunity. Regardless of the small number of students involved in this proposed change these students' needs are of no less importance nor should their educational choices and opportunities be any more limited than those students attending larger educational institutions.