

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**INQUIRY INTO THE REMOVAL OF SENIOR SCHOOL  
ALLOCATION FUNDING FOR YEAR 11 AND 12 COURSES  
AT DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
MONDAY, 17 MAY 2010**

**Members**

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)  
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Liz Behjat  
Hon Ken Travers  
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

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**Hearing commenced at 2.41 pm**

**O'NEILL, MS SHARYN**

**Director General, Department of Education,  
sworn and examined:**

**EVANS, MS MARGERY**

**Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education,  
sworn and examined:**

**LEAF, MR JOHN**

**Acting Deputy Director General, Finance and Administration, Department of Education,  
sworn and examined:**

**PETTIT, MR COLIN**

**Executive Director, Regional and Remote Schools, Department of Education,  
sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, very much. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to the meeting this afternoon, and before we begin I am required to ask you to take either an oath or an affirmation. If you would like access to a bible, Renae has copies—on loan at no extra cost!

[Witnesses took the oath.]

**The CHAIR:** You will have signed a document entitled “Information for Witnesses”. Have you read and understood this document?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Great, thank you. These proceedings are being reported by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document you may refer to during the course of the hearing. Please also be aware of the microphones and try to speak directly into them. I remind you that your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session. If the committee grants your request, any public and media in attendance will be excluded from the hearing. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. This prohibition does not however prevent you from discussing your public evidence generally once you leave this hearing.

Perhaps, to start with, I might ask if Ms O'Neill would like to make an opening statement.

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes, thanks chair. I am going to, if I can, read an opening statement, which I am happy to provide for you at the end.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms O'Neill:** Perhaps if I could acknowledge the committee for your interest in education matters and today in particular for your interest in senior secondary schooling in our district high schools. We also acknowledge the terms of reference published by the committee and will attempt to address

that through this briefing—if I can. It is also understood that you have invited public submissions on the matter.

The department, on behalf of each government it has served, has always had a strong commitment to rural and regional education, and so our commitment is to quality education to ensure that it is accessible and delivered to all the students in its care, regardless of their background or where they live. So we are committed to ensuring that all public school students are well prepared for their future and that they have the opportunities to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge they need to achieve their potential. Of course, this applies as much to students in regional settings and remote settings as it does to any other subgroup of students.

I would like to take this opportunity first of all to acknowledge the work undertaken by my staff in district high schools around regional Western Australia. The contribution of principals, teachers, support staff and administrative staff is considerable, as is their contribution to the communities they serve on a daily basis.

The department would like from the outset of this briefing to express the view that the title of the inquiry, from our perspective, is somewhat misleading. It refers to the removal of year 11 and 12 courses in district high schools and this is not the case. Year 11 and 12 courses have not been removed from district high schools. In fact, district high schools continue to enrol students in year 11 and 12; they continue to run year 11 and 12 courses; and they continue to receive the base school staffing allocation based on enrolments that all the other schools who have year 11 and 12 students receive for this purpose.

As you have asked for a briefing, if I could, I would like to go through some contextual and background detail.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms O'Neill:** I am going to speak first about demographics. In 2010, the Department of Education has 55 district high schools across the breadth of the state—from Fitzroy, Exmouth, Leonora, Nannup and many points in between. The number of district high schools has remained fairly constant since 2000 with only a few minor changes. District high schools represent 7.17 per cent of public schools in the state and in 2010 they will educate a total of around 13 997 students.

Historical remit: District high schools were established many years ago and by definition and practice, until recently—in fact, 2006—have always provided schooling for students from kindergarten to year 10. This practice was well established and understood and senior high schools were established specifically for educating students in years 11 and 12. Prior to 2006, students wishing to pursue senior schooling in rural areas in years 11 and 12 attended nearby senior high schools, which cater for years 8 to 12, or they might have undertaken studies through SIDE—the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, which was originally a pen-and-paper form of distance education and which is now technology-based—or they used boarding facilities available through the Country High School Hostels Authority residential colleges.

As you are aware, a decision was taken by the previous government to change legislation ensuring that all students remain engaged in one of schooling, training or employment, until the end of the year that they turned 17 years of age. So this change was phased in, initially to 16 years in 2006 and then to 17 years in 2008. And so that now meant that it was a matter of law that students engage in an educational or training program of some sort. It was a significant and historical undertaking in Western Australia and had a clear objective of improving participation rates of all young Western Australians, and in doing so providing the platform for individual success. And as a result, the participation rates have improved from 87 per cent in 2005 to 95 per cent in 2009. In raising the leaving age, a key challenge was to provide those students who generally left school at the end of year 10 with an appropriate program if they chose to stay in school or indeed if they went into training or employment. And this sat alongside the other considerable and enormous challenge in

trying to locate and gain the participation of some of the most disaffected young people in Western Australia who had left school already. It was not intended at the time of the legislation or at any time since for district high schools to become year 8 to 12 senior high schools.

I will turn now to the issue of resourcing. The department responded at the time by providing district high schools a more generous base staffing allocation for each year 11 and 12 student than occurred in other schools with year 11 and 12 students in recognition of, in some part, the VET programs that many students in the country undertake. It is important to reiterate that the staffing allocation to any school in our system provides it with the resources it requires to undertake the task at hand; that is—including district high schools—schools are appropriately resourced for the students that they have enrolled. So it is on a per capita basis.

[2.50 pm]

Other issues relevant to district high schools or schools in rural and remote locations, including socioeconomic status, distance and Aboriginality, for example, are addressed through other multipliers in the staffing formula and also through supplementary funding. As the legislation broke new ground, the department made a decision also on top of that funding to provide some transition funding to some district high schools. This transition funding was referred to as “senior schooling allocation” and was to assist in the planning required for the transition and to support the introduction of the new legislation. This transition funding for senior schooling allocation was in addition to and over and above the normal staffing allocations that I have already referred to. In addition to that, on top of the base staffing allocation, many of those schools received additional funding when they were collaborating and providing programs with TAFE colleges and other private providers.

The changes that are the subject of this inquiry to the senior school allocation arose from two key drivers, the first being an educational rationale—that is, our best educational advice about improved schooling for students in their senior secondary years—and, secondly, value for money—the best possible and efficient use of public resources. The department undertakes as a matter of course its own examinations of and discussions about its performance at a system level, a school level and a student level in order to plan its delivery of key services and to make sure that every student is getting the best possible educational experience.

I will turn to the educational rationale first. Following the implementation of the leaving age, concerns emerged about the access, choice and performance of some senior secondary students in district high schools. It is the department’s view, based on our own research and that of other jurisdictions and in discussions with other jurisdictions, that education provision for senior secondary school students is strengthened when those students attend institutions or schools that have the following features: the first being a good range of curriculum programs and course offerings—for district highs this very often includes vocational programs; access to teachers with senior schooling in subject-specific curriculum expertise; cohort sizes that promote a strong academic culture for senior schooling courses and social interaction; and, specialist facilities that are purpose-built for vocational studies, for example, such as specialist media and science, design and technology laboratories and gymnasiums most often found in senior high schools; and, in some circumstances, access to hostel facilities. It is the department’s view, and our advice to parents, that senior secondary students should receive more choice, more support and more specialisation in senior high schools.

The second of the key drivers is value for money. The department is also accountable for the use of its appropriation made for the delivery of key services and outputs, in this case for secondary schooling. The monitoring that the department had undertaken included an assessment of whether the additional funding—the transition funding—provided to district high schools for the purpose of senior schooling and transition had in fact achieved its intended outcome, which was to assist the

legislative change, and to determine whether it was the best use of funding available. We needed to consider whether it was necessary in order to maintain the level of service.

I think it is fair to say that it has long been the case that the delivery of services in WA is unlike other states due to geographic complexity and ruralism. There are inherent inefficiencies in the delivery of services to very small populations of students where economies of scale are difficult to achieve. The cost of each FTE per student in Western Australia is high. In large part, that is attributable to geographic isolation and the high cost of services for Indigenous students. That is more the case in secondary schooling. A good example of the department's decisions to consider the need of country schools differentially, and in particular district high schools, is the mechanism that we use to classify schools, which is how they attract resources. There are two classifications of district high schools, and they are dependent on student enrolment. If the department had adhered to the classification process strictly over many years, the administrative structure of most district high schools would have diminished and reduced greatly. In recognition of the needs of district high schools and of the leadership required there, we have not pursued that. In addition, the staffing formula for district high schools is quite generous. That is primarily because of the requirement to provide equitable curriculum access across the learning areas. The over-resourcing formed part of the consideration in making the decision to cease the senior schooling allocation in some schools.

In keeping with this intent, a number of factors were taken into consideration in the decision. First of all, the senior schooling allocation was considered transition funding for the purposes of the legislation. Secondly, the existing multipliers for years 11 and 12 that are applied in district high schools are higher than those used for other year levels and other schools. It is being calculated on a higher rate. Thirdly, nearby senior high schools are funded for the very purpose that we are talking about, which is senior schooling, and that district high schools and the students travelling to nearby senior high schools do so within the Public Transport Authority's operational policy about how long students can travel.

We also considered inefficiency, the very high cost per student that is being expended, the considerable supplementary funding that district high schools are receiving and now have flexibility over to use for this purpose, and the access through Schools of Isolated and Distance Education. Having regard to all those factors—both educationally and for value for money—a decision was made to reconsider the provision of this allocation to district high schools. At the same time, we were required to commence planning to meet the government's three per cent efficiency dividend and we identified the lack of efficiency in overfunding years 11 and 12 provisions in schools with a very small population, particularly district high schools. On that basis, two key decisions were taken. The first was to cease the senior school allocation to eight district high schools, which have bus transport to a nearby senior high school and/or have extremely low numbers of students, thus giving students an opportunity to access a greater range of programs, specialist teachers and facilities. There were eight schools involved in that. Those schools can all still enrol students and provide programs for those students using the additional funding that they already receive. The second decision was to phase out senior schooling allocation funding for year 11 students in 2010 with funding for year 12 ceasing in 2011 in those district highs that have several year 11 students who have access to a bus to get to a local senior high school and are unable to sustain a viable face-to-face program. The phase in was to minimise disruption to students already in the middle of their year 11 and 12 studies. That applied to 13 district high schools. They are listed in the paper but I have not read them out.

I am towards the end. Implementation: affected district high schools were individually advised in December. We undertook quality assurance processes for those schools where year 11 and 12 students would choose to remain to ensure that the program was appropriate. We offered counselling for parents of students who intended for their children to remain in district high schools and we organised for managers of participation to meet with individual students and parents to give advice on options. We personally ensured that each student's pathway and location for schooling

was clear. The department will continue to monitor the schools and the programs being delivered and the individual students being affected, but at this stage is confident that it is being well managed and is not disadvantaging students.

In terms of the impact on government finances, the indicative target savings were articulated in our budget papers from last year. It was \$1.995 million over four years, comprising \$285 000 in 2009–10 and \$570 000 for each of the remaining years. That is the amount that we would not distribute in senior schooling allocation. That was the preliminary target that we were looking at. Having then undertaken a full detailed examination, we found in fact that in 2009–10 we would not spend \$343 000 on senior schooling allocation, and in 2010–11 it would be \$927 000. We will continue to monitor that.

[3.00 pm]

In conclusion, I thank you obviously for the opportunity to provide you with a briefing. In summary, we want to just reiterate that district high schools continue to offer senior schooling. The access to year 11 and 12 courses has not been cut in district high schools. Base staffing for district high schools remains and remains at a higher rate than in other schools. Year 11 and 12 students continue to enrol and continue to be taught senior schooling courses. Students who wish to stay at their local district high school can do so and will continue to attract the teaching FTE that goes with that student allocation. For strong educational reasons we do believe that students benefit from access to a broader range of curriculum programs; increased access to teachers with senior schooling and subject-specific curriculum expertise, which you get in a senior high school; improved and specialist facilities; and a broader range of training opportunities. It is not intended for district high schools to be refashioned into senior high schools and resourced accordingly. This would create greater inefficiency than already exists. The department is committed to work with all students and all families to deliver the most appropriate educational program in the most appropriate location. Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might just start with some questions just for clarifying in my mind. I realise there is some debate about terms of reference and when is a closure a closure or not a closure. It would help me to understand—you did touch on it—what exactly that senior school allocation is and what it achieves, because I think that is the core. It is obviously the bit that has been taken away. Could you go into that in a little bit more detail?

**Ms O'Neill:** On top of their staffing allocations and financial allocations that I have already talked about, on a sliding scale, depending on the number of students there, they were given an additional sum of funding. They were given it flexibly so they could use it for staffing, as sometimes in some locations they might have used it to purchase services. The amount varied for schools. It was a considered transition, and it was provided to them over a couple of years. I am not sure which year it might have started—for some in 2006 and some in 2007.

**The CHAIR:** You say that the scale varied. Could you just give me a little more detail about that?

**Ms O'Neill:** Give you some examples perhaps?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms O'Neill:** Corrigin District High School would have received \$5 700 extra in funding. Wagin would have been similar because they have got similar numbers. But it could have varied up to a larger amount—\$11 000 for Quairading. It was attributed, I think, on —

**Mr Leaf:** It was based on student numbers, and the allocation was around 0.07 of an FTE —

**Ms O'Neill:** It was 0.07 or 0.08 of an FTE for students, then factored in or scaled up in accordance with how many students there were in 11 and 12.

**The CHAIR:** Would you be able to provide the committee—I do not know whether you have it now—what that was for each school?

**Ms O'Neill:** What we can provide for each school is their senior schooling allocation in 2009. I have not got it, but we can provide it as supplementary. I have got some examples here.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Can we also get 2008 and 2009; and, if you have done the projections for 2010, that would be good?

**Ms O'Neill:** What we can give you is the schools getting it in 2010, understanding that some have not received it in 2010.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But you gave us the savings—if you could break those up by the savings per school. I think you just said \$927 000 is what you expect to save in the 2010–11 year. That must break back up into individual schools.

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes; okay, for 2008, 2009 and 2010.

*[Supplementary Information No A1.]*

**Ms O'Neill:** Sorry, Chair; if I can just clarify it. For the schools who have had it removed, that is your interest, I take it?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Can we get them for all the district high schools? There are 55 of them in the state.

**Ms O'Neill:** Not all schools receive senior schooling allocations. We can give it to you for the ones that have or do receive it.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** But if you can give us the list of the 55 and then if you could provide the committee with a list of those that do have it, we can draw whatever parallels we like. That way we have covered the lot.

**The CHAIR:** In terms of the decision to review the provision of that senior school allocation funding, could you just clarify when that decision was made? My understanding is that there was not a formal public announcement about the decision; this information has come into the public realm from interested parties, I guess. We are interested to know when that decision was made.

**Ms O'Neill:** Sorry, Chair; you are asking when schools were advised?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms O'Neill:** In December of 2009.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But it was part of your budget. You said earlier, I think, it was considered as part of your budget for this financial year.

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes. Schools were advised in 2009, but it was part of our three per cent efficiency. We had given some indicative targets in the 2009–10 financial year budget papers.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But this program was not specifically mentioned in the budget papers, was it?

**Ms O'Neill:** No, it was not. In the budget papers there are larger groupings of savings strategies and it was a subset of them.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I think when you appeared before this committee to do with both the three per cent and following the budgets, I think you were asked for a breakdown of your savings, and I do not recall this being allocated as one of the savings, even when you gave us a more detailed breakdown of those figures.

**Ms O'Neill:** At that committee hearing, I think you asked for examples of what we would be given, so they were not given in total.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Just on the three per cent, in terms of your three per cent efficiency dividend, what was the total amount that made up your three per cent? Out of your \$4 billion budget, how much were you required to find as part of that three per cent in total?

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** What has that got to do with this inquiry?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It does; it is going to relate back very quickly.

**Mr Leaf:** Page 348 of the *Budget Statements* sets out the broad categories for the education sector. For 2008–09, there was a target of \$22 019 000. For 2009–10 the total was \$93 642 000.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The reason I ask is that you need, in between 2008–09 and 2009–10, to find \$115 million or whatever it is. Having made this decision in relation to the senior school allocation, you expect to find savings of less than \$2 million over four years. There is something that does not sort of add up here. You did not meet your three per cent efficiency dividend. You are advising the committee that this is a part of meeting that requirement, yet this strategy, which no doubt is causing some pain out there, is, according to you, worth less than \$2 million over four years.

**Ms O'Neill:** Chair, I am not sure what the question is. Yes, it was part of the total package. We did make some savings and we did not find all of the three per cent efficiency dividend savings. That is true.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I am a little bit confused now, because I am not sure whether the driver for this cutting—if I can use the word—of expenditure to the district high schools is driven by the three per cent dividend issue or whether it is by the research as in your letter that went out to the schools—not from you, but I think from Ms Evans—where it says that research however shows that the education provision is strengthened for year 11 and 12 students. If the research suggests that, that is something quite different in my mind than if it is driven by the three per cent. Which one is the driver of this?

[3.10 pm]

**Ms O'Neill:** As I outlined in my statement, there are two drivers—there is certainly the educational rationale and our firm belief for senior secondary schooling that the students and their program is strengthened if they are able to attend a senior high school; and also the efficiency dividend because it was our belief, or it is our knowledge, that the funding was transition funding. Once that transition period of having the legislation in place was there, it was not going to be needed in the same purpose. There were two drivers, but the fact remained that parents wanted to exercise a choice. We gave advice about the best educational setting but some parents still would prefer their child to stay at the district high school. There are two drivers—key educational advice and a financial driver that we needed to meet. Our examination of our own performance and our own programs in contributing to that performance is ongoing. We had already started that work. We already had some concerns. The three per cent efficiency dividend, or in fact just generally, the principle of value for money always forms part of the review of our programs.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** May I ask a hypothetical question: if the three per cent dividend had not been required, do you think that this would have been driven by the research?

**Ms O'Neill:** The decision, as I said, is driven by the research already. Would we have still made the decision? Yes. The department was still of a mind to provide very clear advice to parents about the best educational setting. We would have wanted to look at the value-for-money proposition—we are responsible for that—was this money best spent in this manner given the over and above staffing allocations and funding that district high schools already get and can use for this purpose? Given that this money had met its objective of assisting schools to implement the key leaving age legislation—so that objective had been met, the planning had been undertaken—given all of those things, we still believed that that decision was appropriate. We were in a position, even if the efficiency dividend was not there, to reconsider the best use of that funding that had been provided for transition.



**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I will just continue with that theme. I ask this question to get a bit of a better understanding because it will lead me to another area. With the transitional funding, can you give me some examples of what that actually covered in some of these district high schools?

**Ms O'Neill:** Despite the advice about the best, in our view, educational location for senior schooling, it became evident during the early days of the implementation of the leaving age that some students, and indeed some parents, preferred their children to stay in the local district high school and undertake a program there. These schools, many of which—in fact almost all of them—had never had year 11 and 12 before. It was like a transition seeding–funding arrangement that allowed them to explore what they would need to do to put in place provision for those students, even if it were to engage in the kind of support that students might need. It was short term to enable those schools to plan appropriately—the time to talk to those students, to reconsider their timetables et cetera. That is one part of it. Where some students stayed in the district high schools and undertook some of those senior schooling programs, some students engaged in vocational training with private providers. Some funding was used for that, or indeed additional staff to work with some students; remembering that some of these students either had not been in school for some time and were required now, under law, to attend, or were the sorts of students or children who would ordinarily not stay at school and in fact were compelled and did not want to be there—high cost, high needs some of these students at the time.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** As you said, a number of those students actually enjoyed the education part in the classroom as well as the vocational training outside the classroom. I think somewhere in the research it talks a little bit about that but it does not refer to the success or failure, external to the school, of vocational or educational training and what that did to the quality of the students' growth, if you like. It is not mentioned there. I would have thought that would have been a pretty integral part of the so-called research.

**Ms O'Neill:** The research that is referred to in your paper, or the success indicator, is the key indicator that was used for the leaving age legislation; that is, the increase in participation rates. The initiative itself was to have students engaged in school, in training or employment, and is a success on that basis. We refer there to an increase in participation rates. Schools would be the first to talk of their successes of young people engaged, who would not have been engaged before—some liaison with local private companies to assist in vocational training, a strong feature in rural locations as well as in the city. I think certainly from the key performance indicators that the government itself set for the initiative, participation rates in schooling, participation rates in training and in employment, we rely on that research to tell us that the program in fact was successful. The withdrawal of the senior schooling allocation has not impacted on those participation rates.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** The participation rate may be a measure. The interesting part about the measure also, I believe, is the additional quality they get. Let us assume the participation rate is assumed. By staying in the local district school rather than travelling on a school bus for an hour or so in the afternoons when they go home, these students go out and work in the local businesses. I have seen the results of some of this. The results are sometimes absolutely outstanding. I am not confident that that part has been taken into the research because that can only occur if that is in conjunction with the actual district school in situ, if you understand what I mean. They go to the district school, not to the high school well down the road. Has that been part of the research?

**Ms O'Neill:** If I could clarify: if you are asking has the research extended to the social impact of young people staying and studying in the location —

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Not just the social, it is the educative quality of those students who have access to firms in the town. The district high school where they go, they get business training as well as the in-classroom training.

**Ms O'Neill:** The research that we would point to, the emerging research—we are monitoring this over some years—is the outcome. Students who study TEE courses and who indeed study VET

qualifications, overall their academic and vocational outcomes—their qualifications overall through the WACE—are higher when they participate in a senior schooling location.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** In a senior high school location?

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Rather than in a district high school location?

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But how would you know that?

**Ms O'Neill:** We know that because we see their WACE scores and their TEE-VET qualification scores as part of their WACE. Remembering that their tertiary entrance rank is now a combination of academic and vocational, the overall median TER is higher for students when they study in senior high schools than when they take senior schooling studies in district high schools.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But you have only had that for two years. Is it not since 2006 you have had the students in senior high schools?

**Ms O'Neill:** Students in senior high schools?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Sorry, in district high schools.

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes; and that is why I said we are monitoring it, because it is emergent data. But it is true to say that over some years we have had a handful of year 11 and 12 students who have studied in district high schools because of personal or family reasons. That is why I was cautious. I do not want to overstate that as a piece of research. It is something that we are monitoring, but it is clear to us thus far, emergent, that where students study, for all of the reasons that we have outlined, in a senior high school, to date it appears that their median TER, or the median TER of those students, is improved, as I might say is NAPLAN years 3, 5, 7 and 9. We are talking secondary, so year 9.

[3.20 pm]

Given the focus of this inquiry is years 11 and 12, what we are saying is that we see some emerging trends that concern us—which is why we were looking at the data in the first place—about year 11 and 12 students studying in schools that have small populations of senior schooling studies and courses.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Just one last part on that, Director General, because there may be advice. I accept what you say, but is it possible to table the research so far, because I can imagine a natural bias. Those who are academically interested will tend to go to the high school, and those who are not are not going to go to the high school at this stage of their development. They could well grow, as they do often grow, beyond that. I would be interested in seeing the basis of that research, if I could.

**Ms O'Neill:** Before I speak to that request, I think it is really important that I ensure that committee members understand that students are not stopped from going to the district high school; in fact, many of the students studying VET will be studying at their district high school, enabling them to do the sorts of things you are talking about in the community, so that opportunity has not been diminished, and they will be doing it in concert with their local senior high school. The reason why I said on a couple of occasions that the data is emergent is that it is internal, although I am not saying that we will not share it. It is not listed as high-powered research as such; it is us analysing our results et cetera, and it forms one part of the range of factors that I have outlined to the committee in terms of consideration, so I would implore the committee to use it in that context. What we have is an analysis of year 11 and 12 data, which we will provide. Naturally, there are some outliers and exceptions—for example, Manjimup which, year by year, performs at a very high level in years 11 and 12 on the league table. That is why I am being ever so cautious about the use of that data; it was one piece in a jigsaw of information that we used.

**The CHAIR:** Before we proceed, I will just give that a number so that we can track that for Hansard. That is supplementary information number A2.

*[Supplementary Information No A2.]*

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Finally, just on that point: as a layperson reading the letters that have gone out to the district high schools, one of the paragraphs is a little misleading, given how you have explained it. To me, it says pretty authoritatively that research shows that education provision is strengthened for years 11 and 12. If it is emergent, that is quite different to what those words suggest.

**Ms O'Neill:** If I could respond to that: yes and no. What I mean by that is that what is not emergent is the research that exists about students having access to teachers who are subject-specific trained. That is not emergent; that is well-documented for teachers in senior high schools who are subject-specific, discipline-based teachers in chemistry, physics and what-have-you. In district high schools, we have generalist teachers taking on courses. That quality teaching, subject specific knowledge, is well-documented, so when the letter says that a range of things are well-documented, that is why I keep saying the TEE/VET performance is one piece of a range of information. That letter does not refer to the TEE/VET performance piece of research on its own for the purposes of the letter; the letter was referring to the research generally about specialist facilities and specialist teachers et cetera. That is what it is referring to, not just this piece of information that we are talking about now.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I am getting a bit more confused as time passes. First of all we are told that the decision was made based on research, and upon closer examination we are told that the TEE/VET performance is one part. I am assuming that that is the research component that you are talking about when you make reference to this decision being made or driven in part by research.

**Ms O'Neill:** I am happy to clarify it again. When we talk about research, as I have pointed out in my statement, there are a range of things: there is students' access to specialist knowledge through specialist teachers; there is access to specialist facilities; there is access to the range of curriculum offerings. What I can provide the committee with later is a comparison for some schools between the curriculum offerings for years 11 and 12 in a district high school versus the curriculum offerings for years 11 and 12 in a senior high school. That plus the small piece of information we are focusing more intently on right now forms the total bucket of research.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I am wondering, Ms O'Neill, whether you can provide for the committee concrete evidence of how you actually got to this decision in respect of these 21 schools that are now going to be affected, because it all sounds a bit vague to me, I have to say. Is it possible for you to provide concrete evidence to the committee on how you—I am assuming that you made a decision and then gave it to the minister, or perhaps it was the other way around; I do not know, but I suspect it was you as the Director General—had your staff look at a range of things and made the decision that perhaps this should be put to the minister. I just wonder whether it is possible for the committee to have access to those pieces of information that you used as the basis for the decision that you made. Is that possible?

**Ms O'Neill:** The department undertook this, as I have described, the examination of a range of information, and I will seek to provide the information as it stands to committee. To restate: it is not one report; it is not one piece of research. It is hours of discussion based on various pieces of information, as I have said, educationally and from a value for money perspective.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** So you will provide that information to the committee. In addition to that, I wonder whether we can have information in relation to the breakup of the \$1.995 million over the forward estimates in relation to the target savings to meet the three per cent efficiency dividend? In other words, how are you going to derive those savings over four years as you had planned?

**Ms O'Neill:** As I outlined in my statement, the original three per cent target that was in the 2009–10 budget papers was an indicative target and we subsequently did detailed analysis of what that would mean school by school. I have already agreed to provide you the impact, school by school, on the actual ceasing of the allocation. I am not sure what else is required.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** We already have that?

**The CHAIR:** Yes. As I understood it, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was asking for the decision-making processes and any information that fed into them. I am trying to be clear about what we are asking here.

**Ms O'Neill:** In the statement that I provided, we tried to outline the decision-making process, so perhaps I need to be a little more clear about what is required.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** For example, you have made reference to some research that was done; I would not mind having a look at that specific research. Given the importance of this decision, there must clearly have been other information. You referred to TEE and VET performance data; there must be other considerations that were also taken by the agency. For example, you may well have had consultations with some of the communities that may have been affected by this decision. Were there any consultations? Who did you consult with? Who did the agency consult with?

**Ms O'Neill:** We did not consult with the school communities.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Not at all?

**Ms O'Neill:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Again, to be clear, the research has already been asked for; it is supplementary information A2.

[3.30 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** In terms of the documentation to follow the history, I would like to see which part of the department first suggested this measure.

**Ms O'Neill:** Can I clarify the relevance of this?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is for us to worry about. I would like to receive any documents that were produced prior to the budget cut-off date for 2009 that analyse the financial implications of the decision and identify the assessment of this measure. I would like to see any documents that were produced prior to the cut-off date for the 2009 budget that analyse the educational impacts of the decision.

*[Supplementary Information No A3.]*

**Ms O'Neill:** As I have outlined, the efficiency dividend for the budget itself was an indicative target. We are being asked for various pieces of research. As I have described, that is not one collated item. We will provide you with what is available, and the background information that we used to arrive at this decision. As I have said, for the budget papers, it was an indicative target and work was done post the establishment of that indicative three per cent target. We will provide what we can.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** With all due respect, and I appreciate the offers that you have just made, I would have thought that very specific documentation was generated as part of the preparation of the three per cent that assesses the impacts from both a financial point of view and from an educational point of view. I would like to see both of those sets of documents, not just the ones you have just offered to us. If they do not exist and all you did was write a single line on the budget proposing that this would be the case, you can advise us to that effect that there are no documents and we will take that at the time. When you are doing a measure like this where it is a direct payment to a school, I would have thought that you would have a reasonably good idea of how much you were

paying to the schools and that would give you an ability to know what the saving would be by cancelling those payments.

**Ms O'Neill:** We already agreed to provide you, as Hon Ken Travers has outlined, with what would be deducted from each school. We are happy to provide the documentation that we have to inform the decision.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If you can search your records and find the very first document where this measure was proposed, I would appreciate that as well.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I refer to the letters that the deputy director general sent out to the schools. How were those letters received by those schools and what feedback have you had from the schools since those letters were sent out? Have any major problems arisen? I want to know how the schools are coping with what was in the letters.

**Ms Evans:** The letters were sent out in December 2009. Telephone calls were made to all of the directors of schools and a teleconference was held. They subsequently contacted their principals. Where there were families or students who needed support, that support was provided through participation coordinators, through people in the district office and through the directors of schools themselves. There was little response subsequent to 2009, this year. Some schools have written back and expressed concern. We have worked with those schools to ensure that students are well catered for in their local senior high school, that they are able to undertake VET programs in their local area and/or they remain at their local district high school and are supported through the SIDE program.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** By and large, are the majority of the schools quite happy with these arrangements and willing to go along with what the department is proposing?

**Ms Evans:** Two or three schools were not happy and we have not heard concerns from the remainder of the schools.

**Ms O'Neill:** Funding allocations and staffing allocations fluctuate from year to year. Our schools work within that framework. It is student enrolment driven. Sometimes transition funding is given over time and other decisions are made. It is not an unusual situation. Staffing and funding does change from year to year.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I am intrigued by your comment, Ms Evans, that you only had a response from three or four schools, I think you said. This goes back to you, director general. Is the culture in your department one where there is certainly a lack of encouragement to inquire about directives—it is not a directive but whatever you want to call that paper—coming out or is there a culture of transparency and openness where they say they have a problem with this? What culture do you aspire to have and what culture do you think you have?

**Ms O'Neill:** We would aspire to have a culture where people's views are professionally respected. For the most part, we achieve that. That does not mean that everyone is happy with decisions that are made. As director general and as the corporate executive, we are called to make decisions that sometimes not everyone enjoys. We have laid out here today our view of the educational rationale for this decision but also the value for money efficiency, which is a key indicator in our budget process from year to year. I think the culture is pretty robust. Our district high schools know that they are funded appropriately for the number of students they have. They also know that they are funded in an overstaffing sense for some of the programs that they get. They also know that funding is allocated on the basis of distance and socioeconomic disadvantage for the very reasons that we are talking about—rurality, distance and the like. I think the culture is one of understanding differential resourcing. They also understand the environment that we are operating in. At the end of the day, some schools will argue when resources are reconsidered. I think that is healthy. They had the opportunity to have these conversations with their directors of schools. In some cases we were asked to reconsider. In some cases we did reconsider. The phasing process is one such

reconsideration. I think that that culture is a healthy one. Certainly, some schools will outline in their submissions to you that they would prefer more money. I cannot imagine a school that would not. Each and every student in those schools has been looked after individually and counselling has been offered to students and families. I think the students' needs come first and we do not believe that they have been disadvantaged in this situation.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I am intrigued that there were very few responses to that letter going out, given what you have just said.

**Ms O'Neill:** Could I just add to that? District high schools know and understand that they are there primarily for K to 10. Part of the response is a confirmation of what their remit is, given they also appreciate that they need to work with some individual students.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Just on the district high schools still, how do you work out the loading? For example, where you have a district high school that is reasonably remote, still in the agricultural region, I know there are distances between the schools but also distances either side of where the students have to go.

[3.40 pm]

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes, that is true.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** In the tertiary instance, there is a five per cent loading, which is not enough. Everyone says it is not enough for the tertiary area. Do you have a loading for district high schools in the regions, as opposed to the cities, that can compensate for the additional costs that are necessary; and if so, roughly what is it?

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes. All regional and remote schools have various loadings or multipliers for what is termed broadly "disadvantage". It could be number of Aboriginal students, distances, remoteness or socioeconomic index, and all of those multipliers are applied several times over to the staffing, to their base funding and any other supplementary funding that they provide on top of that. There is what used to be commonwealth supplementary funding, which is now just part of our ordinary base. There is a range of ways that those schools have been acknowledged. In addition to that, I made reference in my statement to the department consciously making some decisions to over-resource those schools in respect of some of the functions they undertake, given the challenges that they face. I do not have that with me—I was not preparing to answer the question about the different multipliers—but we can provide some background on how we deal with distance, for example, in our indexes.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I would like to add a little to that, if I could. What was the multiplier and has that been changed as a result of the changes that you are talking about in this letter?

**Ms O'Neill:** The multiplier has not been changed.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** It is just that the transitional funding was above the multiplier, was it not?

**Ms O'Neill:** The funding that I have referred to was over and above all the other funding—base plus multiplier plus supplementation—that these schools get.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Right. But you would not have known the precise multiplier prior to 2007 or 2008 when it was decided to ensure that everyone goes through to years 11 or 12. You would not have known that, and the multiplier would have had to change to accommodate that, I presume?

**Ms O'Neill:** If I can find an example for you that might help you: let us say there is a district high school that has—I do not know—12 students. If they were in Perth, they would be treated in a certain way with a weighting. We have treated all of those students with a higher weighting because most of them will do some vocational education and training in their courses. In addition to that, year 12s have a much greater multiplier, in fact, of 1.76—it is a complex staffing formula—because

they are valued, rightly or wrongly, as a higher weighting than say K, year 1, year 2, year 3 or year 4. Already there is a higher multiplier for year 12 students. We have increased that multiplier for these students in district high schools for all the good reasons that we are talking about today. Therefore, those 12 original students by now are counted as about 16, when you put all the multipliers in—or thereabouts, as I am just giving a rough indication—and then that is multiplied by an FTE count. That is just on your base multipliers. Then, on top of that, are the multipliers for distance, rurality, et cetera. These students have been treated in that way. That funding is staying in the district high schools. We are not removing that funding. We are only removing the interim transition funding for the purposes of the legislation. We are maintaining all of the overfunding—all of the generous weighting for these students—so that they can maintain these programs in district high schools if that is the choice they make. The staff ratios in some of these schools are quite low, in comparison, to assist this.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Based on those multipliers that would have been there for any high school that had year 11 and year 12, the district high schools with years 11 and 12 would have got the additional funding based upon those multipliers, not just transitional funding. They would have had significant increases.

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes. And in addition to that, in my statement I have referred to education and training planned funding where they work with their local training institutions so that on top of the base funding—part of the premise of us feeling that it is an appropriate thing to take away this interim funding is that district high schools are receiving multipliers, additional staffing—we have maintained their classification so that they have more administrative staff than they ought to in recognition of the issue that we are talking about. We will continue to monitor, but it is our view that those schools have sufficient resourcing, and now in taking away this transition funding—we have transition funding for a range of initiatives; this is not an unusual setting—we believe and we know that those schools are well placed and well resourced to provide for students that continue to turn up in the district high schools.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I will repeat that because I want to make sure that I understand very clearly. A bit of a test here is that if students leave a district high school to go to a senior high school because they feel that the funding cuts or whatever might have affected their child's education, that is suggesting that the transitional funding that was used was required.

**Ms O'Neill:** I am sorry. Could you say that again?

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** You have the transitional funding—it is all there, the current status quo—if at district high schools parents think that their child has got to go to a senior high school that is a long way away—however many kilometres away—that would suggest that the transitional funding, by the evidence, was required to maintain what was in that district high school?

**Ms O'Neill:** No. I do not believe that to be the case. It is our view that for students who remain in the district high schools there is sufficient funding—in fact, we believe there is appropriate funding because it is per capita plus the multipliers, plus the supplementation—for the schools to provide an appropriate program for the students who remain. The transition funding was to enable the school—not the students; it was not student driven, even though it was on a per capita basis. It was not money that was given to students. It was for schools to plan for the introduction, to understand the legislation, to understand notices of arrangements and to understand the legal requirements of the legislation. When that transition funding goes, there is sufficient funding in the schools for programs to be continued or to be maintained. The advice that has been given to me is that this is exactly what has happened for those students who have remained in the schools.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** On your earlier evidence, the education outcomes will be diminished.

**Ms O'Neill:** It is our view that their outcomes would and could be advantaged. Obviously it is always individual, as they would have more expansive opportunities in curriculum. I can give some

examples. The difference in choice between three TEE or three certificates in a small district high school, as opposed to 20 or 21 course choices and 16 certificates in a senior high school. Choice, of course, is very important in both TEE and VET and access to specialist teachers. The teachers who have been involved in TEE and VET provision are more experienced generally in specialist facilities. There are students who thrive, as we know, in district high schools who are doing year 11 and year 12, but there are always going to be exceptions. Our advice to parents is, yes, if you choose that your child can remain and undertake their studies in district high schools, we will do everything we can to support those students, including the additional funding and support that we provide. It is also our advice that there is access to more of those other things I have just described in senior high schools, but ultimately it has been left as a parental choice.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I want to wrap up the thing that I heard before. The transitional funding was more for administrative education for the management of the school, not for the education component going down to the students in those district high schools. Is that pretty right?

**Ms O'Neill:** It is fair to say that it was used for both. Flexibility was given for schools to decide how that funding was best used. Some schools used that funding to access programs—for example, working with a local business. I would not want to say it was used solely for administrative purposes. Schools could use it to work out how they were going to start providing programs, if they needed to. It was transition funding and it was understood, given all the other funding sources, that they would be able to sustain the programs they set. That funding was not there forever.

[3.50 pm]

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Maybe in the course of our investigation we can talk about that with the schools to find out because some of those schools that allocated that for educational purposes think they can do without it.

**Ms O'Neill:** Our evidence to date is that, in all the schools at which students have remained, they are undertaking appropriate programs. It is therefore our belief that without the funding they have been able to continue providing programs. I imagine some of the schools will say, “Yes, but if we had more we could do more.” Of course, that is the case.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** We will be aware of that.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Director General, can you provide the committee with the senior school allocation for each of the 55 district high schools in 2007–08?

**Ms O'Neill:** I think we have agreed to do that.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Fine. Who made the decision?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are you talking about just the transitional funding or are you asking about the total funding to the schools?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I am talking about the total funding to the schools.

**Ms O'Neill:** I am sorry; I thought you were asking for the senior school allocation.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** No; I am seeking the total funding for 2007–08, 2008–09 and 2009–10.

**Ms O'Neill:** Can I ask the committee chair to be very clear about what constitutes in your mind total funding to the school.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Everything. What constitutes in your mind the total funding to the school? There must be a quantum amount.

**Ms O'Neill:** Staffing allocations or the school grant.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Maybe breaking it down into the different categories would be useful; for example, what is the base funding, and the supplementary funding.



**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** We want to get a picture—certainly I do to inform me—of the staffing trends, the grant money trends and so on. I can only get that if they are categorised and trended over a time frame?

*[Supplementary Information No. A4.]*

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** You referred to the indicative target figures that you provided the committee. Were the original indicative target figures and the savings you had hoped to achieve based on 21 schools right from the onset or were we talking about another number of schools?

**Ms O'Neill:** I am advised that the original indicative target was a preliminary examination of those schools that would have reasonable access in accordance with a travel policy, for example, to a senior high school and factors of that sort.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** How many was that, approximately 20?

**Ms O'Neill:** Approximately 21.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It is the same. You mentioned post-target figures, which indicates that there is a variation between the indicative and the post-target figures. I wonder whether you can provide the committee —

**Ms O'Neill:** I already have; it is on page 6.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** In relation to the magnitude of the decision, why did you or your delegate not consult with the respective communities?

**Ms O'Neill:** The decision taken was on the basis that this funding was transition funding for the school. Firstly, we do not tend to consult with the school community on a budget for a school or a funding allocation for a school. The decision to change a school's funding allocation would not be something that we would normally consult with the school community on. That being said, secondly, the decision that was taken to remove some transition funding did not change for parents the fact that the students, if they wanted to, could stay at the district high school. The choice of going to a senior high school remained and the choice of staying at the district high school remained. Courses can be provided in both places.

Firstly, we did not need to consult with the parents on course provision because the courses would remain and, secondly, we did not need to consult on the budget allocation because that would not be our normal way of operating.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I have a hypothetical question. I like hypotheticals. I have a child going into years 11 and 12. For reasons of health, for instance, I do not want my child to travel too far. The courses he said he wanted to undertake in years 11 and 12 are specifically physics, chemistry, English and German for TEE. Can my child go to Dongara High School and study those four TEE subjects in years 11 and 12?

**Ms O'Neill:** Dongara will either offer those courses itself or it will attempt to access those courses through the Schools of Isolated and District Education. Yes, within reason. From time to time your child might elect to do a course such as historic Japanese or something quite specialised. We could not guarantee that every school could offer that. We have never been able to guarantee that. For the most part, schools will either offer a course or assist a child, or the school will find access for those courses through SIDE.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** It will not matter if my child is the only one in those years studying those subjects; if they are available will he be able to stay at that school and do those subjects?

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes. In country locations, in some instances, we have very small class sizes for that reason and sometimes single students study courses through SIDE.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Can you guarantee that anyone who wants to study a course in a district high school will have access to that course?

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** “Within reason” is what the DG said.

**Ms O'Neill:** I did not guarantee. I said that, for the most part, except highly specialised courses, the school will either offer it or it will make attempts to, and most often achieve that, through Schools of Isolated and District Education. I will not pretend that we can guarantee that every single student will get choice of anything they want in every location. We cannot guarantee that at Melville, Churchlands or Perth Modern.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** In undertaking a course, would there be supervision by a teacher at the district high school?

**Ms O'Neill:** If a child is undertaking a course in a district high school that is being run by the district high school, yes, of course he will be supervised. Students undertaking SIDE currently, whether they are in a district high school or in a Perth metropolitan school, are supervised. From time to time that supervision may include a teacher's aide, and where that is appropriate to the teacher's aide role, that has been the case for many years. They are supervised.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Who made the decision? I want to get this right about who made the decision that this funding be withdrawn from the schools.

**Ms O'Neill:** It is fair to say that, ultimately, that decision rests with me. The translation of that decision, however, into the three per cent efficiency dividend involves the minister.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Were you approached by the Economic Audit Committee in relation to finding that additional savings to the three per cent target?

**Ms O'Neill:** In terms of this decision?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Yes.

**Ms O'Neill:** No; the Economic Audit Committee has never approached me directly about any particular saving.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Twenty-one district high schools will have their senior school allocation phased out. Am I right in assuming that the other 34 district high schools will still receive a senior schooling allocation?

**Ms O'Neill:** Some schools never received a senior schooling allocation because they did not have years 11 and 12. Also, a number of schools are not district high schools because we do have some very remote schools referred to as primary with secondary tops, which refers to primary schools that have one or two students studying years 11 and 12. At this stage, those schools are not included in the revision of the senior schooling allocation.

[4.00 pm]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Are there any schools that are still going to receive the senior school allocation once this decision for the 21 schools we have been talking about has been implemented? Will there still be schools receiving a senior school allocation?

**Ms O'Neill:** There are a number of schools that will continue to receive it because there is not a senior high school nearby, perhaps, and they are some of the schools that I have just referred to.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Right. Can we get a list of those that will continue to receive the senior school allocation?

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A5.*]

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** As a result of that, I am also interested because you keep referring to it as a transitional payment, but it does not seem to be referred to as a transitional payment in all of the early documentation, it seems to be referred to as the senior school allocation, so where does this terminology of a transition payment come from?

**Ms O'Neill:** My understanding is that when the legislation was implemented, funding was provided to the department for different purposes, including participation coordinators, the education and training plans that I have referred to, and some funding to assist schools with the transition program. Whether or not there was a term used in documentation in the past, I would not be able to definitively say; however, it has certainly been clear to me during my involvement in this program that that was the intention.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Again, I will ask if you can provide us as supplementary information any documentation that identifies that this payment had a fixed lifetime, so that it was intended that it would eventually be phased out.

**Ms O'Neill:** If there is any such documentation, I have not had it to hand, but if it exists, we would be able to provide it.

*[Supplementary Information No A6.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I assume if it was meant to be a transitional payment that would have been recorded, and that would be phased out. That would have been recorded in some documentation at the time that that funding was given as opposed to here is additional funding to deal with the fact that you are now going to have senior students in district high schools.

**Ms O'Neill:** But the funding provided to the department for the implementation of the legislation was used in various ways and over time those ways have changed, so I think it is fair to say that the money provided was used for different strategies. The rollout of those strategies has occurred and therefore the funding, which is part of the department's appropriation, has changed over time.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The next question I have is: when you talked earlier, the figures you gave for Corrigin and Wagin, I think they were, talked about payments under the senior school allocation of about \$5 000 in 2010 or 2011 I think it was. Having just done a quick calculation of the total savings that you are expecting, and I got the impression that that was sort of the range in which the figures were occurring —

**Ms O'Neill:** No, as I said, they scale up larger than that; it is entirely dependent on the number of students that have been there. You have asked for supplementary information for the senior school allocations for all of those schools.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I would hope that the ones that you gave us were some sort of average payment. But when I do the sums of the amount that you are saving and divide it by the number of schools, it is more like \$44 000 per school. Is that —

**Ms O'Neill:** No, if I misled you, I did not mean to, I was talking about small district high schools. It does range; I can give you a much larger figure, for example, Jurien Bay \$122 000. So the range is much greater, which is why I agreed to give the total.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** All right, but that gives us a better picture because certainly I was left with the impression that you were giving us a range there of sort of 5 to 11 and I am glad that I have clarified that.

**Ms O'Neill:** No, sorry, the schools that we referred to in the beginning—the ones that have their money cease altogether—tend to be smaller schools, smaller number of students and smaller amounts.

**The CHAIR:** I will touch on that because it is something I want to clarify. In terms of that cut-off of what is small or what is considered small, is that sort of a definitive figure?

**Ms O'Neill:** They range, remembering we are talking about the year 11 and 12 component of a district high. For example, Wagin had in 2009 one student, ranging to, so that I do not mislead you, say, Jurien Bay that has 25 year 11 and 12 students.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, so that is the full range.

**Ms O'Neill:** Forty-two would be the largest at probably Roebourne or, say, Gingin with 34—that is the year 11 and 12 component only.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So how big are your senior schools in terms of student numbers in years 11 and 12? What would be your smallest senior college school in terms of year 11 and 12 numbers?

**Ms O'Neill:** I have not —

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Central Midlands Senior High School, director general, is the smallest I think.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** How many senior students would that have in years 11 and 12?

**Ms O'Neill:** There are 172 students, years 8 to 12, but I do not have the breakdown of year 11 and 12. In many of those small senior high schools, a number of the students study through Schools of Isolated and Distance Education partially to achieve some of the course choices that we referred to earlier.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I note from the documentation you have provided us today that it says Roebourne deferred—why is that?

**Ms Evans:** Roebourne because the AACC, standing for —

**Ms O'Neill:** The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee.

**Ms Evans:** The AACC has identified Roebourne as an area where there is intense support being provided. It was decided to defer the phasing out in that school for a further 12 months, so phasing out of the senior school allocation will begin in 2011 and move on to 2012.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** My final question is: in relation to these schools that will lose their—we can call it what we like—senior school allocation funding, have you done any predictive modelling of how many students you expect will now go to a senior high school who would have otherwise gone to the district high school?

**Ms O'Neill:** We know that many students or families have exercised their choice to remain in the district high. They are happy with some of the course provision there, so we have some idea already of the number of students, I think, who have moved to the senior high school and the numbers who have stayed.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Can you provide us —

**Ms O'Neill:** I am just looking for it.

**The CHAIR:** Would it be more useful to provide that as supplementary information, just so that we get the right figure.

**Ms O'Neill:** We will provide it; yes. It is a dynamic number, chair.

*[Supplementary Information No A7.]*

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I would appreciate the current figures and what your expectations are on the current figures, but I also would be interested in if you did any modelling prior to the decision being taken of what your expectations of shifts in student numbers were. Is it possible to get that? I assume you would have done modelling of what you expected.

**Ms O'Neill:** We spoke individually to the parents to get an idea of what their preferences would be and the preferences and the outcomes have held pretty tightly.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Yes, but I am asking a question: did you do any modelling of what you expected the impact to be on student numbers as a result of removing the senior school allocation?

**Ms O'Neill:** We would not have a document that would show modelling. Our directors of schools, our managers of participation, as I said, spoke to students individually when it was apparent that a

number of them were going to stay where they were. We confirmed if students were moving to the senior high school that there would be capacity and programs, there would be, and so on that basis we did not do any further formal modelling. It was unnecessary at the time given the interviews or counselling that we had held.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Have you done any modelling on what the impact of this decision will be on the cost of providing school bus services—the additional cost of providing school bus services?

[4.10 pm]

**Ms O'Neill:** I am advised that the vast majority of the schools already had bus services because some students were already going to senior high schools, and I would have to confirm if we expended any funding on additional buses—not that I am aware of.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If there is not a bus service being provided, how does this child get from —

**Ms O'Neill:** If there was not a bus service being provided, then we would have provided one. So if there is an additional cost, we can make that available, but my understanding is that as some kids are already exercising the choice to go to senior high schools, bus services were already in place, remembering that some families elect to go to a larger town for the purposes of education. So many bus services already existed. If we put on additional bus services, Chair, we can provide that information.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I would have thought that before you take a decision like this you would do some modelling of what the expected impacts were going to be on the requirements of bus services.

**Ms O'Neill:** I think it is important for us to point out that our people on the ground, our directors of schools, know these schools intimately, they know the bus services and they know where people are going from a town and past a local school to senior high school, so they were able to provide us with information about whether bus services would be provided. We also talked to providers of the bus services to ensure that they were in place. We did our homework. We made sure that the bus services were there. Students who are exercising their choice right now to go into those senior high schools have access to the bus services.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I would have thought that that information would be consolidated into a document. It might have been on a district by district basis, but I would assume that information would be consolidated into a document.

**Ms O'Neill:** We went through school by school and asked the question: do they have access to a bus service—yes or no—and the answers were yes, so we have that on a piece of paper.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just ask, following on the question of buses: is there an additional cost either to the bus service or the student for getting on that bus?

**Ms O'Neill:** The individuals are not having to pay to go on the bus, not in this case.

**The CHAIR:** The service is running anyway —

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes, that is right.

**The CHAIR:** In all cases there is a service running anyway?

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes, I do not think there was any case where there was no bus service.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** There was a bus service to every school, so for every town where the district high school had the senior allocation removed there was a bus that went to the nearest senior school from that town?

**Ms O'Neill:** There was access to a bus in every case except Lake Grace.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And so in Lake Grace you had to put on an additional bus?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** To Narrogin Senior High School?

**Ms Evans:** Yes, there is no bus service.

**Ms O'Neill:** In 2009 at Lake Grace there was one student who was at Lake Grace in 2009, so in 2010 they were going to be a year 12 student. Because there was not a bus service, they became part of that phasing group where they had the funding so that school would continue to have the funding in that year.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Have you got any modelling of how many students are coming into the system and what impact that is going to have? How many year 10, year 9 and year 8 students are you going to have in Lake Grace District High School who will be going on?

**Ms O'Neill:** The public school system has a commitment to students studying in years 11 and 12, so if at Lake Grace more students come through, then we will have to negotiate a form of bus service. That is what we do on a regular basis.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is the point I am getting to, because what I want to know is what modelling you did on that. For instance, I think you talked about 42 students being at the Jurien district high school doing years 11 and 12. If all those choose to go to—I do not know which is the nearest: Gingin or Moora. If all those students choose to go over to the Moora senior college, one of the issues, and I have seen this happen in the Wanneroo district high where many years ago there were threats of closing years 8, 9 and 10 at Yanchep district high, what you see is a sudden departure of numbers of students as parents put them straight off to Wanneroo, and then that reduces your capacity to provide even more and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, that you end up with having to take 42 students. You are not going to do that with the existing bus fleet, I would have thought. You would need either to upgrade the buses to a larger bus size or to put on additional buses at that point. What I am trying to understand is what modelling did you do as an organisation not only for the current years but for the out years in terms of predicting what the demand would be for bus services and what it was going to cost you to provide those bus services as a result of this decision to remove the senior school allocation.

**Ms O'Neill:** We have over time enrolment trends in district high schools that are generally in decline, and so they are not growing as a school sector; in fact, had we, as I mentioned earlier, maintained our processes around classification, many of these schools would no longer be district highs; they would be primary schools. We have maintained the classification so that parents do have the choice in small regional centres or places to keep students, particularly in years 8 to 10, and not have to travel. So we know already that they are not growth areas. We do monitor that year by year in consultation with the bus service providers. So we do not have modelling on the basis of that decision, except to say that we look at the enrolment trends, and we are satisfied that these schools are not growing in student numbers, but we will continue to monitor that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can you give me the cost of a bus service from Jurien to Moora? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

**Ms O'Neill:** We would have to source that from PTA. We do not run the buses nor do we pay for them.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** From what I am gathering in all of these, when you took the decision you did not take into account the cost of additional bus services—in a generic sense—but in terms of the actual detailed costing that was not taken into consideration.

**Ms O'Neill:** The bus services, except for that one location, already exist, and so from our perspective there was not an additional cost to it, mindful of the fact that this was allowing the choice to be exercised that some of the students would stay in the district high school.

**The CHAIR:** That question might need to be directed to another department, so we will not ask you to chase that one up. We will chase that one up.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Director General, when you made the original decision about the funding in relation to these schools, did you take as a part of your consideration the distances that would need to be travelled by students in order to get —

**Ms O'Neill:** Yes, we did.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** You did, and so did you think it was reasonable that a student going from, let us say, Lake Grace—although you do not have one now you may in the future—would travel for 167 minutes one way, which is more than three and a half hours a day on a bus? Did you think that that was reasonable in terms of their educational performance?

**Ms O'Neill:** There is a policy—not our policy—that the Public Transport Authority has that sets the policy about what is a reasonable distance for students to travel, and I think I have that in the notes that I provided.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** It is 42.C.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Yes, but I am really interested in your opinion about what is reasonable, and ensure the decision that you made in relation to funding and the fact that it has resulted in some students—there are others, for example, we have Quairading to Northam, 103 minutes, which is 206 minutes both ways, and we can translate that into hours; we have Jurien Bay to Moora, 118 minutes, which is 236 minutes both ways. In terms of your own professional judgement and when you weighed up all the factors in making the decision that you made, do you think it is reasonable to put students on a bus for that length of time to travel those distances?

[4.20 pm]

**Ms O'Neill:** Before I answer that can I just clarify that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich is referring to the minutes for travel? If I can just take you back a step to Jurien Bay, which is 118 kilometres to Moora —

**The CHAIR:** Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was referring to some answers provided —

**Ms O'Neill:** You might be referring to kilometres rather than minutes.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Sorry, I am referring to kilometres instead of minutes. Anyway, they do not line up too far apart. It is still a very long trip. For example, it is 118 kilometres from Jurien Bay to Moora. It is actually worse.

**Ms O'Neill:** Having travelled to most of those locations—if I can step back for a moment and then answer your question, there is a long-established policy that this department works with the PTA about travel; 90 minutes of travel one way is the accepted travel time. Many students travel up to 90 minutes one way. Some of them are younger than the students that we are talking about here. That is well-established practice. Whether or not I think it is appropriate, the parents have exercised their choice to allow their children to either travel or not travel those distances. If they do not think that is an appropriate distance to travel—it is their choice, despite what I might think—their child can stay at the district high school and access the courses they would like to access.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Those kilometre figures are the figures from the high school to the high school, are they not?

**Ms O'Neill:** That is right.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** If a child lives another half an hour away from the district high school, which is not beyond the realms of possibility, that could add another half-hour each way, which is an hour a day. Can you assure us that no student will need to travel for 90 minutes from the point of pick up at the closest point of their home to a senior school?

**Ms O'Neill:** You are quite right. If a student living on the outer edge of a district had to travel a distance to the school before he travelled out, and the student was outside of the 90-minute travel range, we would not expect him to travel. That is the point of ensuring that adequate staffing and

funding has remained at the district high school so that those students can have an adequate program. That is why the student can continue to access study through SIDE. The removal of the senior schooling allocation for transition purposes does not in any way take away the capacity of that school to provide those programs for those students.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But it does take away the additional funding that was previously provided to assist in providing those educational opportunities for the students in those circumstances.

**Ms O'Neill:** While that is true—it is a removal of transition funding—funding is not static. We know that it is a dynamic. Funding comes in and out of those schools. Since senior schooling allocation, we have had the advent of other initiatives that provide funding for schools for different purposes. In fact, we have untied it so that it is flexible and can be used for this or for other purposes. The department does not think that the removal of the senior schooling allocation in any way prevents the schools from undertaking the course provision that parents might expect of the district high school.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Director General, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich asked you a question about whether you consulted the schools before reaching a decision on this before December 2009. I think you said that you did not.

**Ms O'Neill:** We did not consult with the school community.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Okay, with the school community. Was there a reason why you did not consult with the school community?

**Ms O'Neill:** I think I made reference to this previously. Department's budgets and allocative mechanisms are not subject to consultation. We do not go out to parents and ask whether they think it is appropriate for us to have this allocation or that allocation; they are government policy driven and they are departmental decisions.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I understand that, and that is fair enough. However, when it comes to vocational educational training for years 11 and 12, there is a community relevance because often they are going up to firms and there may or may not be firms in the community where children can get vocational training effectively in conjunction with the schools. I would have thought that you would not have had much of an idea about that unless someone had consulted with the school communities.

**Ms O'Neill:** All the practices of schools, in relation to their collaboration or their partnership with business providers or community groups, is still absolutely possible in district high schools right now. There was no reason to say to people who we are working with that we are going to take away transition funding. Likewise, businesses that we have been operating with would not consult with me if they were shifting their budget allocations around. We have given the district high schools a greater weighting for VET partnership than city high schools. They already have the capacity in the first instance. Through the education and training plans, a number of them are getting additional funding to undertake VET activity. On top of that they have their own flexible funding and years 11 and 12 are weighted significantly higher than other years. Our assertion to the committee is that the district high schools already have, and continue to have, the capacity to undertake all those activities that they undertook before. I am sure that some schools will say that if they had more money, they would do more. Of course they would, but we are saying to the committee that the overfunding of district high schools through at least four or five mechanisms that I have explained at length today, means that from our perspective the schools can still do all the things for the very few numbers of year 11 and 12 students doing VET as they could do before. We acknowledge the involvement of the school communities, particularly in VET. It is dependent on that and so we were very conscious to ensure that the schools could maintain that relationship and activity.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** I hear what your decision is.



**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The committee has received correspondence from the president of the P&C of Gingin District High School expressing its concerns about the decisions that have been made. From my point of view, I wonder what you would say to the P&C. The P&C has outlined the reasons that the alternative arrangements for their students are not appropriate. Of the alternative school suggestions, Clarkson Community High School, is over one hour and 45 minutes away from some students who are living north of Lancelin, Bullsbrook District High School is nearly two hours away and Mindarie Senior College was also suggested to them but some of their students were not accepted due to numbers. What do you say to the parents of Gingin District High School?

**Ms O'Neill:** What I would say, and probably have said to the parents if they have written to us, is, firstly, that they have a number of options available to them. Mindarie has a specialised year 11 and 12 campus and is 70 kilometres away. I have not been advised that there is not space there for the students. If that is a problem, I would individually discuss that with the people from Gingin.

[4.30 pm]

Secondly, if you do not want your child to travel, they can remain in Gingin with all the funding that has been attracted to them for that purpose, and be provided an appropriate program there. Or you could study mixed mode; you could do some at Gingin and do some by SIDE. In fact, if you were a student who had a mixed mode with VET—remembering that very many of our students, including in the city, study in mixed mode—then you could undertake a combination of those things.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Just following on from that, is a student at Gingin, now that this decision has been taken, guaranteed priority access to Mindarie Senior College and are they guaranteed a bus to take them to Mindarie Senior College?

**Ms O'Neill:** My understanding is that they can access; there are bus services available. I have not been advised that enrolment at that school is a problem; and, if it were, we would attend to it.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It was last year.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am not asking whether or not it has been raised with you as a problem. What happens in these situations is parents often will ring up—they are not as empowered as the people sitting around this room—and they will say, “I want to send my kid to Mindarie college” and they will say, “No, there are no places at Mindarie college.” You are absolutely right; Mindarie Senior College is a specialist senior campus. It is one of the few in the state. If that is the closest senior college, I would have thought, if you are no longer providing funding for Gingin, that a student at Gingin should be given priority access because they were within the catchment. There should not be any question mark; if they ring up and apply, they will be admitted to that college. That is what I am looking for—a commitment that that is the case and that that is a policy and that they will have a bus service to it. Again, I am aware that there have been issues in the past about buses going over to Clarkson or Mindarie. You are obviously aware of those issues as well. What I want to make sure of —

**Ms O'Neill:** As painful as they are!

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** — is a student from Gingin can be guaranteed. It is not a matter of them having to ring up and go through a process of being an empowered parent to ring up the director general or even the director of schools or the principal. I have been knocked back.

**Ms O'Neill:** We totally agree with you. Under the education act, now that the legislation goes to the end of the year a child turns 17, we are compelled to ensure that that access is available. There is senior schooling available at Gingin and that still remains. What we have said is there is bus access available to Mindarie, and if Mindarie is in fact the closest school to Gingin Senior High School—if that is the case—I would expect that those students do have automatic enrolment.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I suspect you will find that Clarkson is probably about 500 metres closer to Gingin than Mindarie.

**Ms O'Neill:** And they might want to go down there.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** When the new TAFE facility is finished at Clarkson, they might want to go to Clarkson, and that is great. But if they want to go to Mindarie, I want to be assured that they have got the option.

**Ms O'Neill:** Chair, if we have not made those statements clearly, I am happy to take that on as a piece of work that we can do so that the communication to parents is very clear about what their entitlement is.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps we can take it that you will follow that up.

**Ms O'Neill:** We will follow that up.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** I am still on the Gingin letter. On page 1 it says that GDHS currently has the largest enrolments in SIDE and to ask that these students not have any support and be unsupervised at all times is outrageous. Earlier you said to us that people undertaking SIDE are supervised and do have support. How did you respond to that part of the letter?

**Ms O'Neill:** We have many students studying by SIDE. It is certainly departmental expectation that students are supervised. It is a requirement that students are supervised. We have some students who study by SIDE and who are at home, so they are not in our care, but that is a different arrangement. If students are in school, studying part or full studies through SIDE, they will be supervised. They will not be in a room by themselves looking after themselves.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** So where would they have got that from—that they would have no support and be unsupervised at all times?

**Ms Evans:** The school council president also forwarded the same letter to me. I have asked that all of those things be investigated. They should not be happening. Students should be being supervised. Students should have access to their closest senior high school. We will see that all of the detail in that letter—I cannot remember; it may have been last week or the week before—has been followed up through our executive director and the district director of schools.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Are there clear departmental guidelines given to the school to say that if a student is studying subjects with SIDE, this is how that must be conducted and this is what will happen to that student?

**Ms O'Neill:** We have a duty of care to all students. We have students studying mixed mode all of the time, and it is very clear our expectation is that they will be supervised.

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** But are there set guidelines from the department with regard to SIDE?

**Ms O'Neill:** Under duty of care, all students, regardless of how they study, are required to be supervised. It is under the legislation.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** And when we say “supervised”, we mean having a teacher there. Although they have got course work in front of them —

**Ms O'Neill:** As I said before, not necessarily a teacher. Remember, if you study by SIDE, you are not left to your own devices; you have a teacher through SIDE and that is the agreement that parents and students and SIDE make. But in addition to that, if they are being supervised, supervision can be undertaken by teachers and it can be undertaken by education assistants, dependent on the education assistant’s role.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** In your letter that you provided to us as an attachment on 12 May—the letter that you sent out to the district high schools—the last paragraph says that the director of schools will make direct contact to discuss the implications of this decision and support will be

available for students likely to be at risk by participation coordinators. What were the risks for students that you identified?

**Ms O'Neill:** Participation coordinators' role —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I know what they do.

**Ms O'Neill:** Okay. In relation to this, if there were students who undertake varied programs because of their level of risk of disengagement, as it were, we would want the participation coordinators to be working with those individuals and their parents. In other words, we did not want any student to somehow get on a bus and go to another school and then start not attending or not being engaged in their programs. We were very mindful of ensuring—this is all about participation—that every student who came under the care of a participation coordinator did not somehow fall through the net.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Obviously, I do not want specific examples, but has there been work that has been required to be done by the participation coordinators as a result of this decision in terms of students shifting the school they attend?

**Ms O'Neill:** The participation coordinators have met with students in their care individually and their parents to ensure that they have a location and a program. I am unaware of any particular problems that we have had about students who would be classified as participation or at risk. Chair, we know where every child who has decided not to go to a district high school has gone and we track them individually.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I notice your participation rate has gone up from 87 per cent to 95 per cent. Where are the other five per cent and what are you doing about them?

**Ms Evans:** That is a whole other inquiry!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It is a very good inquiry to be had, but we will just stick on this one.

**Ms O'Neill:** I do not know the number. I do not have the number at hand.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Can you provide us with that number on notice?

**Ms O'Neill:** I think we probably could, yes. I am just trying to recall. I think we would have that number. There are a number of young people—you would remember the group; the most disaffected—who we do pursue relentlessly to try to engage them. We do get them into programs and they do not turn up, so there is a high turnover for a very small number of students that remain outside the percentages that we are talking about. They are elusive and some of them move frequently. They are a difficult group to work with. Now we have individual records about who those people are, and we follow them up almost on a daily basis to try to get them into some program. We have had some places in care schools provided to us. We have other training programs and community-based organisations who also work with us to provide programs to these students.

[4.40 pm]

**The CHAIR:** I will give a number or identifier for that. I think what Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has asked for is the estimated number of non-participating —

**Ms O'Neill:** It will be point in time.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Yes; whole numbers, not percentages.

[*Supplementary Information No A8.*]

**The CHAIR:** I have a couple of things I want to check. We might already have this information, I just want to double-check. In your statement, have you advised how many students from each school were affected by the decision? If not, could we have a breakdown of those affected by the decision in 2010 and those affected by the decision in 2011?

**Ms O'Neill:** Chair, just to clarify: in what way “affected”? What I can give you is the enrolment of kids in years 11 and 12 in 2009–10 because they are potentially affected. If you would like to know the numbers of students that have decided to leave a district high school and go to a senior high school, we can provide it but it is blurry. Some people are making different decisions for different reasons. In those schools that have had their senior schooling allocation ceased, if students decided to go to a local senior high school rather than a district high school, we could give you that number. The number is small.

**The CHAIR:** That would be useful.

**Ms O'Neill:** We could probably tell you now, chair. Fifteen students have decided to move from their district high school to a senior high school; or to another school in fact.

**Hon PHILIP GARDINER:** Can I just clarify that number? That 15, do you know whether they were students who were going to do their TEE or non-TEE students?

**Ms O'Neill:** We would have school by school. Each school would have that information but we do not have that. Sorry, chair, a couple of those students have not gone to a senior high school but gone into apprenticeships. That is what I am saying—decisions are made for a range of reasons.

**The CHAIR:** I think you are providing the enrolment figures for —

**Ms O'Neill:** Years 11 and 12 for 2009–10. That will give you the total.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** A point of clarification. I notice in your presentation on page 2, where you look at the “Historical Remit of District High Schools” at point 13 it reads —

District high schools were established many years ago and by definition and practice, until recently, in fact prior to 2006, have always provided schooling for students from kindergarten to year 10.

Having taught in district high schools for most of my career, having taught economics and history, that does not ring true because I taught in the 1980s. Back then, certainly years 11 and 12 were in district high schools and courses of study were offered.

**Ms O'Neill:** My response to that would be, as I said post my presentation, there are some exceptions to that. Obviously where you were was an exception. There have been some places from time to time that have years 11 and 12 students by virtue of the fact that there were personal reasons, such as they could not go anywhere else. But the custom and practice for most district high schools, the vast majority has been that they have had K to 10.

**The CHAIR:** This question is a bit out of left field, but since we are talking about the most disadvantaged students I could not resist the opportunity to ask if there is any update you can give us on the Balga Works compensation question.

**Ms O'Neill:** I thought we were going to get there!

**The CHAIR:** I get rung up every day on it.

**Ms O'Neill:** It might be a question best put to the minister. What I could say—and it probably does not help—a decision is, as I understand it, imminent.

**The CHAIR:** It might be a question for the minister.

**Ms O'Neill:** That is perhaps best.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending this afternoon and for your assistance to this inquiry. You will receive a copy of the transcript as usual. We will end the hearing now. Thanks very much.

**Hearing concluded at 4.44 pm**