



WACSSO

Partnering with P&Cs to
advance public education

Submission to the Inquiry into the Child Development Services

WA Council of State School Organisations

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations pays respect to Traditional Owners throughout Australia, recognising their connections to lands, waters, and skies.

We acknowledge parents, families, Elders, and communities as first educators, sharers of culture and knowledge; and recognise the value these learnings hold for children and young people.

Partnering with P&C since 1921

WACSSO acknowledges parents as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and value the diversity of families, recognising the vital role they play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys. In this submission WACSSO uses the word parent to represent the different people who are a child's primary caregiver. This submission was informed by the experiences of Western Australian parents of children attending public schools, Parents and Citizen Associations (P&Cs) and school communities. WACSSO would like to thank the parents who have shared their experiences and concerns regarding child development services with WACSSO.

About WACSSO

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia. For over 100 years, WACSSO has provided services and representation at State and National level to more than 660 Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs). WACSSO is primarily a volunteer organisation made up of a President and State Councillors (representatives) from geographically based electorates. As such, the organisation has a wide representative reach across the state. WACSSO uses our strong networks with parents, carers and stakeholders in public education to inform our advocacy efforts.

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Introduction

Child development and education are closely connected. The triumphs or failings in one area will significantly impact a child's success in the other. Children have better opportunities to achieve developmental milestones when capable and nurturing families support them and supportive well-resourced communities. This submission is informed by the experiences of parents whose children attend WA public schools and of WACSSO affiliates.

The Inquiry into Child Development Services provides an opportunity for the State Government to improve accessibility to child development services to ensure all students and families have every chance to overcome developmental barriers and reach their potential.

The role of child development services on a child's overall development, health and wellbeing.

Child development services play a critical role in children's learning and school experience. Failing to identify and address developmental hurdles has significant educational and life impacts for children and young people. Parents have a close interpersonal relationship with their child and play an integral role in the child's physical, cognitive, and social development. Parents are often the first to have concerns about their child's progress; however, these concerns are only sometimes immediately addressed. Having easy access to paediatric or occupational health experts as a part of the school community helps parents share their concerns, allowing for earlier intervention and support.

Teachers are also in a pivotal position to observe developmental delays in children and, with their professional experience, can identify a problem. Providing teachers with access to child developmental practitioners ensures that important milestones can be monitored through an expert lens, and where there are concerns, partnerships with families are developed to improve outcomes for that child.

Schools are well placed to facilitate early and ongoing support that aids children's health and wellbeing. Some families will, for a number of reasons, struggle to seek out and provide the required health and wellbeing support for their children. Therefore, children and young people who cannot access services outside of school must be identified and given access to the developmental support they require to reach their potential. Schools must be resourced if they are to play the role of facilitators and access points for children's services. Such resources include:

- the appropriate technology to support remote appointments, such as telehealth;

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- suitable areas where children can comfortably engage in their therapy sessions/appointments;
- expert support for teachers and education assistants who assist in the programs;
- funding for the required FTE allocation to support students to access services that directly support their learning and education outcomes; and
- additional funding to address skills shortages in regional and remote areas.

The delivery of child development services in both metropolitan and regional Western Australia, including paediatric and allied health services

Schools are places of familiarity for students and their families regardless of location, metropolitan or regional areas. WACSSO supports the strategic statement of the Western Australian Department of Education, every student, every classroom, every day (2020). In particular, we acknowledge the improvement drivers one and five 1. Provide every student with a pathway to a successful future; "5. Partner with families, communities and agencies to support the educational engagement of every student." (WA Education Department 2020). These drivers clearly state that every student can be successful, and it takes a collaborative approach to support students to succeed.

Parents are strong advocates for their children and have a right and responsibility to access the required services for their children. However, WACSSO affiliates have expressed frustration when accessing some of these services. Quality health and development services are essential for all children, especially children with additional vulnerabilities. Children living with disability face many challenges with developmental milestones and their education. These challenges can significantly strain families as they work to ensure their child has every opportunity to obtain a successful and fulfilling future. Unfortunately, there are several shortfalls in accessing the services to best support learning outcomes.

WACSSO's Federal Election position paper highlights the concern of parents when trying to access support in school settings for their children, particularly with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Parents report that establishing appropriate NDIS plans for their children is frustrating and challenging; this is exacerbated by the lack of expert advice concerning the classroom setting. This frustration also impacts school staff as parents desperately seek advice and assistance during the planning and implementation process to ensure the provision of the appropriate resources in their child's NDIS plan that will support learning outcomes.

WACSSO affiliates also report waitlists impacted by the introduction of the NDIS, with one of our members in the Albany area citing waitlists for urgent paediatrician appointments for approximately six months and non-urgent over eighteen months. These are significant delays, especially in child development and early intervention. Families with the resources to choose private health care also report long waitlists when accessing the service in

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their regional centre. In addition, when families try to access an appointment in Perth, they must pay the additional travel and accommodation costs.

WACSSO represents P&Cs across WA, with many based in school communities in regional, rural and remote locations. The Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education Final Report highlighted accessibility deficits in Australia's regional, rural and remote education delivery. The report's continuing theme was the difficulty of having the same level of access to the resources as their metro-based peers. (Hasley 2018). The equity barriers contained in Professor Halsey's findings expand outside the education sphere across all areas in regional communities and are further amplified in the smaller rural and remote communities. In these communities, many of the healthcare services are delivered via visiting services or telehealth. This service delivery is sometimes sporadic, has high turnover of staff, or longer periods between sessions. Ensuring an appropriate location for appointments is important, when a student is required to attend appointments outside of school, their school day is interrupted. Having regular school-based support is more effective and less disruptive to learning.

An amplifying impact of the quality and delivery of child development services is the availability of qualified health providers. This may be due to attracting staff to work in regional areas, the high workload placed on staff, or the need for service providers to do more with less. Concerningly were there is a shortfall parents report that non-expert school staff are filling the gaps, this practice is less than ideal.

Conclusion

WACSSO acknowledges the dedicated and caring people who work in child development services. We also recognise the efforts of teachers and education assistants who, when there are delays in formal programs being implemented, initiate classroom supports for students to assist in improved outcomes. Early identification and intervention is critical to support children to begin their schooling journey in a positive and happy manner. We thank the Committee for their consideration of this submission and look forward to the recommendations that will come from the inquiry.

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References

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2. Western Australia Council of State School Organisations, 2020, p2 WACSSO Submission to the Disability Standards in Education 2005 <https://www.wacssso.wa.edu.au/media/1859/wacssso-submission-to-disability-standards-review-2020.pdf>
3. Western Australian Department of Education, 2020, Every student, every classroom, every day: Strategic directions for public schools 2020 – 2024

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