

WA DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS ADMINISTRATORS' ASSOCIATION

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SUBMISSION FOR THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

This review is incredibly timely and hits at the core of school business and preparation of students for their futures. The discussion paper was particularly lengthy and feedback indicated that the size of this document alone prevented some individuals from engaging with the process. However, at the same time, the issues, challenges, barriers and complexities are so vast that it is unlikely that the document could have been made smaller whilst still doing justice to the topic.

More than half of all District High Schools in WA provided responses for this review.

Some key points in relation to the discussion paper:

1. It is important that the terms 'education' and 'experiences/opportunities' are NOT used interchangeably. When used interchangeably it does not allow concerns to be correctly and clearly identified. Parents identify that they generally move their children to other schools for education (a sense of increased/improved/better academic outcomes) and/or experiences/opportunities (living away from home, being part of a larger cohort, to study music as an extra, be involved in drama productions etc). These words have different meanings.
2. Required subjects for university entrance: the current WA system of university entrance actually has a smaller list of pre-requisite Yr 11/12 subjects than it had in place say 15 years ago. This is a positive move.
3. The WA Department of Education submission to this review will no doubt specifically reference 'loadings' in the current funding model.
4. Data does not adequately capture that differences in NAPLAN achievement is actually NOT a country versus metropolitan issue, it is about ICSEA. The strongest correlation is between a school's ICSEA and NAPLAN results, not location or size of school. Size can affect breadth of curriculum but not student achievement.

Within WA there are over 40 District High Schools spread out across the state. They range in size from 73 to 657 students. Most are Kindy – Year 10, but some also have Year 11/12 students. The closest District High Schools are approximately 40km apart, however there are approximately one quarter who have no other schools within a 200km radius. Within this sector, there is significant variation in context with the more/extremely remote schools having significant aboriginal student populations of over 90%.

It was evident from the responses received that the viewpoints of those in more/extremely remote District High Schools were often quite different to those in the Wheatbelt and South West regions of WA. This is totally due to the significantly different contexts in which they work.

The cluster school concept in existence already within Victorian or South Australian models has limited transferability in WA. This is due purely to distance between schools, which limits a face to face cluster being developed. The population and town density within WA is much lower than most other states which have developed some cluster models.

RATINGS QUESTIONS

A summary of the ratings for each question are included:

Q1. To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on curriculum and assessment? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important):

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	0	0	4	22	26	47

Q2: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on school and community? Choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	0	0	4	17	26	52

Q3: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on leaders and leadership? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important)

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	0	4	9	39	30	17

Q4: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on school and community? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important)?

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	0	0	4	17	30	47

Q5: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on information and communication technology? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	0	0	4	26	39	30

Q6: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on entrepreneurship and schools? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	4	0	4	8	20	45	8	8

Q7: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on enrolments? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	4	4	0	21	43	4	4	17

Q8: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on clusters? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	4	8	8	20	33	12	8	4

Q9: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on distance education? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	9	30	9	30	17	4

Q10: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on boarding? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	17	4	0	22	13	35	4	4

Q11: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on diversity? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	4	8	0	8	8	21	29	21

Q12: To improve the achievement of students and their transition to further study, training and employment, how important is it to focus on transitioning beyond school? Please choose from 0 (not important) to 7 (very important).

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
%	0	0	0	4	8	17	25	46

1. CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

Parents sometimes perceive their child has to 'leave to learn', which is quite a different concept to 'learning for leaving'. Many of these reasons will be raised at the forums and through other submissions.

6.1.1 Is the Australian Curriculum meeting the learning needs and interest of regional, rural and remote students?

6.1.2 Do current assessment processes help to improve the achievements of regional, rural and remote students?

Multi-year class groupings, which are more common in non-metropolitan schools, can be challenging for teachers. The structure and specific content requirements at each year level of the Australian Curriculum content has exacerbated this challenge compared to past curriculums in WA.

With high quality teachers, this challenge can be met easier. However, with so many schools faced with less experienced teachers, and at times teachers teaching outside of their areas of expertise, this is made much harder. Many leaders also felt that the curriculum is overcrowded and leaves teachers delivering a 'rushed' program rather than enabling a focus on supporting students at their point of interest or current or future need.

A number of respondents felt that that Australian Curriculum, as well as the WA version, is skewed towards metropolitan examples and opportunities. The curriculum overview assumes and expects that all students have access to all available resources. Sadly, in reality this is very difficult and impossible at times to achieve. Access to fast speed internet was one of the most common issues, besides staffing, amongst all non-metropolitan schools. There was a strong sense that the contexts and challenges facing regional, rural and remote schools are not only different to metropolitan schools but also not well recognised or understood.

It is also important to note that a number of respondents felt that the Australian Curriculum is, and sets, the standard and that it should be consistent in terms of content and assessment across Australia because that is what is needed for success in the broader community. In terms of employment these students will be competing against others from metropolitan schools for further training and employment and hence accessing the same curriculum is vital to ensure a level playing field.

Whilst the curriculum attempts to meet the needs of all students, the diversity of students within a school also makes it harder to meet the learning needs and interests of students. Many students who find learning challenging are not within the realms of the learning expected at specific year levels. This requires very specific and individualised learning programs to be created to ensure their basic literacy and numeracy needs are being met as the highest priority. In schools where EAL/D and Aboriginal students make up a large portion of each cohort, the inability to modify the curriculum to suit their needs is a huge obstacle. There is a lack of understanding of the issues facing schools in terms of curriculum delivery. A wide range of assessment types is also required to enable some students to demonstrate what they have learned. NAPLAN is a classic example of a test type that does not meet the needs of all students.

For some schools, especially the more remote schools, the backgrounds and future needs of students are not well catered for. There was a sense that regional, rural and remote youth and families do not have enough input, as well as information and support, to fully engage with the curriculum.

Many schools are already struggling to access a teacher to deliver Languages: this is about the inability to attract a teacher with the knowledge and skills. Some of the online programs could potentially work quite well, but bandwidth and cost of hardware is a current barrier to success.

6.1.3 How can schools be supported to deliver the Australian Curriculum in a flexible way to meet local needs?

The current curriculum is too prescriptive in terms of content and limits the capacity for flexibility and contextual appropriateness and need. Additional funding to provide increased DOTT release time to enable teachers to develop rigorous yet contextually relevant programs that satisfy State education requirements at both the community and individual level would be beneficial to help improve student outcomes. This could also include STEM, specific trade options and pathways, life skills as well as targeted vocational education for all secondary students. The Big Picture Education and Inquiry Based Learning approaches being trailed in some schools are showing positive signs of success in a number of communities from remote to metropolitan.

Consultation with communities and management of ongoing community based networks is critical. This includes local agencies, parents and employers. In more remote schools, Aboriginal elders can play a large role in school's attempts to contextually map the curriculum to the needs of the students and the school.

To negate the tyranny of distance, online learning to access specialist teachers, cluster schools, or to collaborate with other schools and classes would be an asset, yet again concerns with bandwidth and technical support prevent these options from being fully explored or even tested. The Department of Education has developed an amazing platform called 'Connect' for teacher, student and parent access to support these and other styles of learning, yet bandwidth prevents many country schools from even utilising this option.

Currently the economics of delivery costs determine what is available to schools. Smaller schools find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to offer the same breadth of curriculum as larger schools. To address this inequity, a differential funding model must be applied to enable smaller class sizes to exist in smaller schools. Even when an online learning approach is chosen, a staff member is required for support and supervision. Current funding models do not provide for these smaller class cohorts and options.

Not surprisingly personnel are a key factor in the success or otherwise of these alternative approaches. Schools need to be supported financially to collaborate, share and mentor to help increase sustainability. Due to high staff turnover, short term funding approaches do not work.

6.1.4 Are there other examples of innovative ways in which curriculum is being delivered in regional, rural and remote schools?

Currently poor bandwidth is a major barrier to innovative approaches being explored. With improved bandwidth, better technical support, investment in teacher skills and improved hardware the use of ICT to develop programs and resources for schools could be improved. In WA we have Teacher Development Schools who could be harnessed to work with regional, rural and remote schools to develop tailored programs for the needs of school communities.

The Kimberley Schools Project aims to support teachers in schools to modify their teaching approaches and deliver more targeted explicit and direct instruction and may prove to be a solution as this project is rolled out.

In terms of other programs that are showing positive outcomes: SHINE program to build vocational skills for young women, Clontarf academies for football, fee for service through TAFE providers (although costly) and work placement programs are all meeting the needs of students.

See Attachment 1 for a sample of programs currently being implemented in WA District High Schools. Each of these projects has a community focus and addresses local needs.

Distance has prevented some of the successful cluster school models in operation in the Eastern States from being implemented in WA.

2. TEACHERS AND TEACHING

In WA it must be noted that there are many schools that meet the federal government definition of 'remote' which DO NOT ATTRACT ANY TEACHER INCENTIVE PACKAGES to attract and retain teachers. Unfortunately some of these incentive packages do not even meet the additional financial costs of higher grocery prices.

Whilst it is right that attention be paid to attracting 'top' teachers to rural, regional and remote schools, there are many cases where it has been impossible or at the very least challenging to even at times attract ANY teachers to some locations and teaching positions, let alone ones of a high calibre. In WA the Level 3 classroom teacher initiative had potential, in reality this has served to create an uneven distribution of level 3 classroom teachers into the more desirable locations, many of them metropolitan or coastal.

6.2.1 What key initiatives are helping to attract 'top teachers' to regional, rural and remote schools?

6.2.2 How can we improve retention of 'top teachers' in regional, rural and remote schools?

Currently there are no initiatives in place which are working to attract 'top' teachers to these locations, however there are some initiatives in place to attract (any) teachers to some rural and remote locations. It is interesting that this question is about attracting top teachers when some schools at times struggle to attract ANY teacher to fill a vacancy, let alone a high calibre teacher.

In WA the Remote Teaching Service is designed to attract teachers to the perceived more challenging teaching locations in WA. Incentives include:

- permanency after 2 years
- significant locality allowances
- additional leave entitlements

With merit selection processes being used to fill most teaching vacancies, permanency is not as valuable as it once was. One disincentive with the remote teaching service is that teachers can be made to lose up to 50% of their DOTT each week without receiving additional payment, this does not happen in other schools and is a workload concern. It is also becoming harder to gain placement back into preferred locations after completing remote teaching placements.

A separate Country Teaching Program incentive scheme offers additional allowances and annual return trips to Perth for select rural and remote schools.

It must be noted that there are many regional, rural and remote schools in WA where teachers in those schools receive NO form of incentives at all - many of which are in close proximity to schools who do receive Country Teaching Program incentives. This has actually made it even more challenging to attract teachers to those schools who do not attract any incentive packages. Effectively as each more challenging sector is offered an incentive package, the next layer of schools below suffers even more in their ability to attract and retain teachers.

The current move towards merit selection of staff has further hindered a country teacher's capacity to relocate back to the metropolitan area, hence they are reluctant to go to the country in the first place.

Recent Government and Regional Officer's Housing rental policy changes mean that rental prices are now connected to WA median rental prices. This has led to teachers in some locations paying much higher rent than the even the higher private rental prices within that community, or reasonable areas of Perth. As a result, some schools have now found it even tougher to attract and retain teachers. This fact was raised by almost all respondents as a major area of concern which was damaging their ability to attract and retain staff. Several respondents quoted that they are at the same pay scale as they were in Perth yet pay higher rent and have increased travel and cost of living expenses compared to when they were living in Perth. It has been a financial disincentive for them to move from the metropolitan area

Suggestions offered to improve retention and attraction of teachers in regional, rural and remote locations included:

- cheaper (heavily subsidised) housing
- allowing regional, rural and remote teachers to use their long service leave over a 5 year period rather than the required 2 years
- increased DOTT entitlements for teachers
- capacity to salary package items such as home loans, health insurance
- fully funded and quality home internet, foxtel and mobile phone packages
- more paid return trips to Perth each year
- financial incentive package for ALL staff in ALL rural and remote locations
- additional days for professional development beyond what is available in Perth
- additional leave entitlements to compensate for travel times to professional learning, specialist or other appointments in Perth
- offer a sabbatical process that enables staff to undertake, if desired, top quality international PL

It was identified that many teaching families wish to return to Perth as their own children reached lower or upper secondary education. Some private enterprises in country locations have managed to retain quality employees by paying the boarding school fees of their employee's children. Hence their children go away to school whilst they retain the quality employee. Maybe this could also be done for teachers and leaders in rural and remote locations to retain them in the country locations.

A number identified that once a teacher or leader could be attracted to a country location, hard work to 'sell' the lifestyle and community paid off and they stayed longer than expected or moved on to other country locations rather than returning to the city. The challenge is attracting them initially. Many teaching practicum students no longer do country service. This is as much about their inability to get time off their part time metro-based work as it is about finding a country school or accommodation in the country town. Possibly practicum teachers choosing to do a country based practicum could be paid a decent financial bonus to make it worth their while in the hope that it will inspire them to actually consider and take up a country teaching position.

6.2.3 What professional development should be available for teachers, schools and communities?

Most respondents felt that they should receive and be entitled to the same professional learning as their metro counterparts. They also felt that there was an abundance of good quality and relevant professional learning available – but that what was lacking was the time and funding to be able to actually do it. It was clear extra funding was needed to enable this to occur.

Types of professional learning sought included:

- curriculum differentiation
- understanding trauma
- Framework for Understanding Poverty
- suicide prevention
- classroom management strategies
- mental health
- resilience, wellbeing, student health
- cultural awareness
- project based learning / inquiry based learning
- digital technologies
- explicit teaching of phonics
- languages
- pedagogy
- effective teaching methods

Courses that met the needs of the individual at a specific point in time were seen as important, and this is evident from the list above.

In terms of delivery, a combination of face to face (metro, region and locally), via video conference or online delivery (via SABA or self-paced) and the use of mentoring (face to face an online) were seen as the best mix. All viewed face to face networking as a vital component of their professional learning.

6.2.4 What innovative approaches could be taken to support a high quality teaching workforce for regional, rural and remote school communities?

Examples suggested included:

- shared specialists between schools (although challenging due to distance and extra entitlements would be needed to attract people to these positions), this could even be via a mobile/roaming service which moves from school to school
- developing sister school arrangements with metro schools for mentoring, sharing, professional learning, moderation, networking etc
- providing weekly boarding houses in larger remote and regional communities for secondary students to keep them closer to family
- development of aspirant groups, graduate groups and cross school faculty teams (which would need to be done by somebody other than school leadership teams who are already overworked)
- reducing teacher contact time to give more time for collaboration

-removing some of the tasks which have become the role of a teacher and handing these to another (new and funded) position within a school would help to reduce teacher workload. This includes having dedicated pastoral care and mental health support people in schools

Finding the 'right' people was viewed as critical to success.

Many of the suggestions of incentives to attract top teachers to country locations are also relevant to help support a high quality teaching workforce.

3. LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

In WA it must be noted that there are many schools that meet the federal government definition of 'remote' which do not attract any teacher incentive packages to attract and retain administrators.

6.3.1 What needs to occur so regional, rural remote principals can devote most of their time and attention to student achievements in and beyond school?

Many leaders identified that their workload was becoming more challenging to manage each year as the demands placed in them as a leader in a country community extends well beyond the school fence. This is compounded by the extent to which schools are having to reach into families to provide support as there are no other agencies available locally to support them. This includes mental health, domestic violence, poverty, parenting support etc. As a result leaders often felt their time was taken up by management tasks which then left little time for actual leadership (instructional and curriculum). This led to a range of suggestions focused on removing many of the operational/management tasks and designating them to a (newly funded) position in the school. Currently, smaller schools have fewer leaders to share these tasks with. Metropolitan schools have far greater layers of leadership to share the workload with.

Many commented on the ever increasing burden of paperwork and processes involved with referrals to, and working with, other government agencies. Part of this has come from the increasing number of families outside of the metropolitan area experiencing poverty and/or dysfunction.

Tasks which could be moved to an alternative management position included:

- behaviour management
- timetabling
- compliance

Alongside a management position, a pastoral care position (often in place in bigger schools) could removing many other management tasks including:

- referrals to psychologists, therapists, disability teams and behaviour centres
- providing support to families
- interagency liaison with police, child protection, mental health agencies etc

It was also acknowledged that it depended on the size and context of the school as to the specifics that were needed above and beyond existing administrative positions to enable leaders to increase their focus on leadership.

6.3.2 What changes could be made to attract and retain experienced educational leaders for country schools?

6.3.3 What innovative approaches could be taken to support high quality leadership for regional, rural and remote school communities?

Many of the suggestions for teachers are equally valid for leaders. These include lower rents, financial incentive packages, paid mobile phone and internet/foxtel, increased and improved leave entitlements.

The sense of leadership in non-metropolitan schools being 24/7 is very clear. The leadership also tends to be isolating, high stress and often with low rewards. Many leaders raised the need for:

- extra and better systems for professional support
- improved collegiate support (specifically support to build collegiate relationships rather than assume they will just happen)
- mentoring
- high quality PL for all leaders in our system, regardless of school type
- increased leave entitlements (increased sick leave to allow for increased travel to appointments, longer time to take LSL, more short leave to address issues of an urgent and pressing nature which metro principals can do after school but which require country leaders to travel)

Having the employer (state or federal) fund boarding school fee costs of leader's own children to go away to school for lower and/or upper secondary would help to retain some leaders in country locations for longer periods of time.

Not surprisingly, lack of close access to medical facilities and career options for spouses were also raised as barriers to attracting some leaders to country locations.

In WA District High Schools with less than 150 students have had a level 5 principal until recently. Now, as that level 5 principal moves on, they are being replaced by a lower level (4) principal. We are yet to see the extent to which this causes a further reduction in the number of experienced and quality leaders applying for these vacancies and whether retention is even lower.

4. SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

School and community partnerships are a critical element for success and the investment in social capital cannot be underestimated. There are many examples of very positive school/community partnerships, however whilst it can be great to involve the school in many community activities and events, at times it is impossible for schools to engage with all of these as schools still need to ensure that there are good links to curriculum for many if not all activities.

The depth and breadth of poverty and dysfunction are having an increasingly adverse impact on and in schools. Child neglect as one of the main forms of disadvantage seen in schools now sits alongside generational poverty/unemployment, domestic violence, substance abuse (parents and students), mental health issues (parents and students), no form of transport within the family and no public transport as one of many more common issues.

The increasing challenge for schools is that there is a dearth of agencies located in the regions to support families experiencing these issues, hence they manifest or at the very least are not able to be resolved through lack of agency access. The support structures and agencies available to families experiencing poverty and dysfunction are much greater in the metropolitan areas. In country areas this is highlighted by a lack of agencies to provide that same family support for parenting, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health concerns, etc. Sadly, the role to attempt to provide support to these families then falls to schools, who are not resourced or necessarily even skilled to provide this support. Hence schools are stretched even further in terms of attempting to meet students and families competing needs and demands.

The capacity of a family without transport, in a town with no public transport, to even get their child enrolled for Yr 11/12 at the school and/or residential college down the road can be a barrier. The same occurs for therapy services and specialist appointments, causing these children to be discharged through inability to engage with a service.

6.4.1 What new and innovative approaches are you aware of that improve the connection between schools and the broader community?

The concern was raised that what might work in one school, might not be suited to other contexts. There was a strong sense that all approaches need to be site specific and not generic.

A range of ideas were put forward, including:

- community engagement programs which were focused and relevant
- having school boards work with a portfolio approach
- making schools a community hub by co-locating other community resources on or beside schools (libraries, child health services, playgroups, daycares, primary health agencies)
- use of social media in closed groups
- strengthening school links with the community (work placements, shows, business expertise, donations in kind)
- ensuring leaders and teachers were 'hi vis' in the community to help break down barriers

-developing community specific curriculum approaches

It was recognised that the word 'innovative' was not appropriate and that it is really just a matter of collaborating on the things that are important to the community and school – the challenge is finding the time and identifying the common purpose. This also requires mutual commitment from the wider community for this to be achieved.

6.4.2 What motivates regional, rural and remote students to succeed and how can they be supported to realise their aspirations?

Key to a student's success is their relationships with others and sense of wellbeing. This requires quality rapport with and positive support from their teachers and family. Staff and parents are both motivators and supporters of students. A recipe for success occurs when students know their aspirations, know that they are supported and know they have people who believe in them. Their own personal values (which are often derived from those around them) and quality of the teachers they have are positive factors. It is important that they are able access the same quality and level of education as their city and regional peers.

Knowing what exists outside of their own community helps broaden student's outlook on what is available in life and the doors which are open to them. This is about exposure to positive models of education, work and ways of life. Students need an education that is relevant to their own lives and builds on the understanding of their contexts. It must also prepare them for what they will face in the next phases of their life after leaving their current school.

Rural students are often inspired by those around them so they must have exposure to real, comparable and aspirational role models. This can occur through mentoring programs, exposure to opportunities and experiences outside of their immediate area (but also within) and a positive sense of the future.

It must be recognised that not all students aspire to leave their community, some aspire to stay. What is more important is that students are making well informed before making their choices. Quality exposure through education, experiences and opportunities that link to their current contexts, but also move them out of their comfort zone, help to ensure students are making well informed choices. Ensuring parents are part of, and a partner in, this journey is paramount.

6.4.3 Are there untapped priorities in rural and remote settings which, if utilised, could help students realise their potential?

Many non-metropolitan communities are renowned for being great supporters of their local schools in any way they can. This includes the provision of work placements for students. However many barriers and blockers prevent the potential within this area from being realised.

In many rural communities the agricultural industry generally remains as an untapped priority. Regulations and the risk of litigation prohibit the potential even being explored, let alone reached. Other potential unharnessed local industry support is in the areas of hobbies and mining (for those communities who have this).

In remote communities culture and the 'pull to country' have not been fully explored or harnessed. Often because the potential ways this could be utilised are perceived as too far left of the notion of mainstream education.

Small business often is a significant part of smaller communities yet do not have the time or personnel able to work on a regular and close basis with schools to explore, develop and implement viable and innovative programs.

Sadly the significant focus on the WA Certificate of Education and the target of 100% graduation rates prevents less mainstream ideas from being progressed as they are likely to not satisfy these requirements.

6.4.4 What role does/could the philanthropic sector play in improving outcomes for regional, rural and remote students in relation to school achievement and post— school transition?

Currently the role of the philanthropic sector within schools is variable across the state. Funding and a visible presence to give credibility to a project are the most typical use at present. Support could occur through:

- provision of funding for resources such as facilities
- scholarships for students to stay within their local schools
- funding to specific agencies to support our more vulnerable families to ensure their students successfully transition to further education. This support could be in the form of money or personnel to work with the family
- scholarships for camps and events to provide exposure for students to experiences and opportunities
- funding mentoring partnerships (such as the True Blue Dreaming Project in WA)

To give students the opportunity to meet with a larger and more diverse group of students and adults than they are usually exposed to and to experience differing viewpoints will help to grow students. This work best in a model that is ongoing, rather than once-off.

5. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Aside from bandwidth as a key blocker to the use of technology in schools, staff turnover and lack of skill also means that many schools do not have anybody on staff who is skilled at troubleshooting and managing IT issues around faults, replacement, connectivity, systems, evaluating hardware/software, quality networking and appropriate purchases of innovative technology to support learning.

6.5.1 What has to be done to ensure ICT supports education in regional, rural and remote schools and communities like it does in the 'best of the best' city schools?

One trip to a range of metropolitan government schools and compare their ICT depth and breadth to that of many country schools and the gap will be obvious.

Low bandwidth would rate as a significant blocker to improved and innovative curriculum delivery methods. It is even a barrier to students just being able to use the internet as a research tool for everyday learning with a classroom teacher.

Two critical changes need to occur:

- a) Improved bandwidth to all schools as a matter of urgency
- b) Resourcing of IT technicians across all schools – this means realistic funding to support travelling technicians from metro or large regional centres as they do not exist in many communities

Further to that funding to support infrastructure, upgrades, connectivity and keeping up with current technology are vital. Schools cannot be expected to have the knowledge and skills to set up and maintain such large and ever increasingly sophisticated networks.

6.5.2 How could ICT be used to improve educational outcomes for regional, rural, remote students?

If ICT was reliable within many regional, rural and remote schools, there would be an automatic improvement. With good ICT funding, knowledge, connectivity and management, it could be used in the same way as it is for metropolitan schools to improve student outcomes.

Schools could use ICT for examples such as:

- work with specialist teachers
- establish collaborative programs with other schools/classes
- use it to share student progress and achievement with parents through 'parent portals'
- online learning
- research
- train teachers
- create online classrooms with other schools
- offer programs not currently available via face to face modes due to small numbers
- ensure we are developing ICT-savvy students to match their city counterparts

6.5.3 What are the main barriers to regional, rural and remote schools realising the full potential benefits of ICT?

Put very simply:

1. the cost of infrastructure/connectivity within a school
2. lack of specialist staff and knowledge (content, connectivity, hardware etc)
3. bandwidth
4. access to ICT technical support to problem shoot, resolve issues, do installations, evaluate potential purchases, manage replacements
5. the cost of hardware/devices and funds for replacement/upgrades
6. staff turnover
7. lack of quality professional development

Some of this is a funding issue, some of purely lack of availability of personnel. Whilst the vast majority of teachers and administrators are keen to explore the full potential of ICT, the frequency of disruption due to poor connectivity and bandwidth cause many to give up. Lack of quality and frequency of use then causes an overall decrease in skill level and this then creates a vicious cycle.

6. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SCHOOLS

This may be a relatively untapped area for schools. A key to the success of such a feature is sustainability of programs and personnel. Too often an amazing program with good outcomes falls over when the key person driving the program leaves the school and nobody else with the interest, skill or passion steps up to take it on. With an already crowded curriculum, fitting in yet another useful and beneficial aspect to student's schooling is a challenge.

6.6.1 What kinds of support would be needed for a school or group of schools to specialise in entrepreneurial education?

This would largely depend on the community, their interest and their level of support. Equally, the same could be said for the school. A motivated and specialised staff and less prescriptive curriculum would help to open up opportunities as a starting point.

Industry (where they exist and have the time and inclination) can work as 'in house' expertise but would need to be long term for this to work best. Whilst this is a great concept, the access across communities would not be equitable. This could mean that it could work in some but not be applicable to other communities.

6.6.2 What other entrepreneurial education opportunities exist for regional, rural and remote schools?

6.6.3 Are there other examples where entrepreneurial education has improved outcomes for regional, rural and remote students?

Many schools have developed small scale entrepreneurial programs to engage students and improve outcomes. Typical examples include school gardens where vegetables are grown and cooked on site, with the excess sold to the community, onsite cafes that operate for limited times each week and growing and selling tree seedlings to farms. These can be very labour intensive from a staff perspective and are not adequately resourced in current school funding models. Goodwill of staff is what keeps many of these programs going. Food regulations often require commercial kitchens – something which is lacking in most older country schools. Some of the fully funded Hospitality Trade Training Centres have been very successful, but do not exist outside of metropolitan or regional centres.

6.6.4 What gaps need to be addressed to help students transition successfully to further study, training or work?

The first challenge is to have all students achieve a sound level of numeracy and literacy. Prior to that the standard of kindy readiness skills that students are starting school with is declining in communities with low ICSEA. There is no point starting at the upper end of education without first addressing concerns in the early years and bridging the gap there.

Second to basic literacy and numeracy:

-career education needs to become compulsory and start in early primary school. The first challenge is to have all students to aspire to work, let alone choose what career they might choose. Then provide access to information regarding the options available. It is important students know what is available to them as a starting point.

-wider exploration of opportunities within and outside local communities

-workplace learning programs. The initial focus is not to learn about an industry but to learn and practice basic work readiness skills (punctuality, communication, appropriate and clean dress, work ethic, asking for help when unsure, etc). Some students come from households where nobody in their immediate or close family has paid employment and hence they have no sense of what going to work even involves – and nobody at home to teach them

-educating parents about the opportunities and experiences available to their children, so they too can be informed and able to better support their children

Lastly there needs to be recognition that some students do not wish to move away from home or their community and that some other students do not have the confidence or resilience to cope with being away from home.

An increasing number of students are finding themselves in the position of being the de facto carers for younger siblings and their own parents due to parents with substance abuse and mental health problems. These students are either unwilling to leave home or desperate to leave home but are not supported to transition. This is another challenge entirely and needs interagency support, which is often not available in rural and remote communities.

Breaking down the cycle within the Framework for Poverty also means there are parents who do not want their children to leave home and sabotage their own children's education through poor attendance or lack of support to prevent them from leaving home for education.

7. IMPROVING ACCESS

6.7.1 Are there changes that could be made to the ways schools are organised and function that would improve opportunities for regional, rural and remote students?

This is difficult when many rural and remote schools have small numbers. Small numbers tends to mean less specialist teachers and less range of curriculum options. The current funding model is based on traditional classroom and school structures and possibly does not fit the next generation or even contemporary education ideals.

School leaders need to be trusted and given more flexibility to deliver programs that will ensure students achieve success within and beyond school.

A number of respondents felt that additional funding should be provided to smaller schools to compensate for their reduced ability to provide a wide breath of curriculum offerings. This would also compensate for school's frequent inability to attract a part time teacher to a school within funding constraints.

Other suggestions include more flexibility with school vacation periods to meet community patterns of attendance, especially in the Kimberley region. Moving away from year and age based classes to more flexible groupings based on need or interest was also suggested.

Sadly it was also suggested that some smaller schools be closed and amalgamated with nearby slightly larger schools to ensure their own viability. However, this tends to only move the challenges rather than solve them.

6.7.2 What could be done to expand the opportunities available to regional, rural and remote students to access high quality education?

Not surprisingly, increased funding is required. Whilst evidence shows school size is not linked to student performance, smaller schools tend to have less curriculum breadth. Additional funding to provide increased breadth of curriculum offerings is ideal, however this will only work in reality if we are able to attract more specialist staff away from the metropolitan and large regional areas to rural and remote communities.

A funding focus on supporting good teaching and teachers is a must.

Scholarships could be funded from philanthropic sources which provide funding for a student to relocate for educational purposes, to other government schools with boarding facilities, when that education level is not on offer in their local community. This could also pave the way for more, smaller residential boarding facilities in more regional centres to keep students closer to home when boarding away. This also has the potential to enable Monday to Friday boarding whilst returning home on weekends. This would also make boarding cheaper and enable a closer link with home to be maintained.

Funding the development of more high quality, self-paced and online courses would enable improved breadth of curriculum for smaller schools. This could be through distance education facilities such as the School of Isolated and Distance Education in WA or other

national bodies which deliver to all states. Students could still work at school with the support of a teacher as needed and have access to a specialist via phone or an online medium. Obviously technology infrastructure and bandwidth would need to improve in schools for this to become a reality.

8. DIVERSITY

6.8.2 What does educational success look like in remote communities?

The definition of success and even the definition of remote communities varies from school to school and state to state. Some of WA's remote communities, by federal definition, are less than 300km from Perth and have at least 5 other schools within a 100km radius. Others are more than 2500km from Perth with no schools within a 400km radius. This was impossible to describe given WA's context and the context of each school. It also depends on the view point of the person you are asking (parent, student or teacher). Some - parents, students or teachers - would say success looks just the same as metropolitan Perth, others would suggest a definition nothing like that. Distance from Perth is not a factor that helps determine what success looks like either.

6.8.3 How can schools/teachers in regional, rural and remote areas be supported to meet the individual learning needs of all students?

Access to quality ICT and quality professional learning was considered essential. Alongside this curriculum consultants who were available to schools to work with teachers within their specific context also rated highly.

However if we come down to the actual teacher, they need:

- ongoing training and support (especially around mentoring, behaviour management and curriculum differentiation)
- less face to face teaching time to ensure appropriate and high quality programs are devised and delivered. This includes time to ensure quality differentiation occurs within the classroom
- strong instructional leadership and leaders who develop a positive school culture focused on student needs

6.8.4 How can we create and sustain vibrant, high quality learning environments in regional, rural and remote schools?

Evidence shows that a strong school culture starts with good leadership and staff. At present, too much is left to chance and the good will of staff. Ways of attracting and retaining high quality teachers and leaders in our schools is critical.

Staff turnover can cause a highly successful program in a school to fold purely because there was nobody with the drive, skill or desire to take over when the key driver leaves. Successful programs should receive increased funding to help increase the chances of their survival through the school being more proactive about finding innovative ways to ensure they continue with quality personnel. This could include funds to train up a new person or offer additional incentives for a person to stay.

Whilst it is not the quality or age of the buildings or how wonderful the gardens are that make a difference to a child's learning, this is a growing concern in many schools. 50 year old plus buildings were designed for an education 50 years ago. The gap between the

design of newer schools and those over 50 years old is growing. It does not grab a student's attention and limits the variety of style of lesson delivery. More funds towards maintenance and replacement are needed.

Current lack of bandwidth, limited funds for ICT infrastructure and inability to find and/or fund ICT technicians is limiting school's capacity to enhance the learning environment for students. More needs to be done in this area, starting with genuine and realistic funding for regional, rural and remote schools.

9. TRANSITIONING BEYOND SCHOOL

The discussion paper identifies parental influence as one of the two strongest indicators of occupational aspirations alongside academic performance. The average ICSEA within Australia is 1000. Only 7 District High Schools in WA have an ICSEA above the Australian mean. It is generally accepted that many rural and remote schools have an ICSEA lower than 1000. Hence, this means that parental education, qualifications and employment type are generally lower in non-metropolitan areas. It is therefore not surprising that generally occupational aspirations of country students are likely to be lower than metropolitan counterparts when parental influence is one of two key factors.

6.9.1 Are there changes that should be made to education, training and employment policies and practices which would improve post school opportunities for regional, rural and remote young people?

Compare two university students studying the same course who have the same part time job and earn the same amount each week. One comes from a metro family and lives at home, the other is from the country and pays rent, utilities and food bills. Their spending patterns and university life experiences are an absolute contrast.

The greatest challenge for tertiary students studying away from home is the cost of accommodation. At commonwealth level it seems short sighted that the Assistance for Isolated Children is not means tested for Yr 11/12, yet it is for university studies. This implies that due to government policy less importance is being placed on getting country students to tertiary education than on completing Yr 11/12. It is impossible for most regional and all rural and remote students in WA to remain at home for tertiary studies. Regardless of parental income, these students have to leave home. Removing the parental income assessment criteria for the living away from home component of youth allowance for regional, rural and remote students as a matter of urgency is critical.

The curriculum is currently so crowded that there is no opportunity to have a transition to post school opportunities component in students' last year of schooling. This type of support would help to better inform and prepare students for this move.

6.9.2 Are there innovative models of accommodation delivery that could benefit regional, rural and remote tertiary students studying away from home?

The greatest challenge is ensuring a smooth transition for students to living away from home, often on their own. Many students find purely adjusting to living independently for the first time extremely tough. Curtin University has some fantastic shared accommodation blocks for first year students with separate rooms but shared living spaces. What could potentially make this even more successful is having an adult 'residential support person' who drops in and spends time with each student over the week to help them manage the transition for the first 12 months. Some of UWA's residential colleges include meals but this makes it very expensive and many students find this unrealistic and they end up paying for meals they aren't there for- hence they pay for a meal they don't eat and also pay again for eating out. UWA's model would work better if students could, a week in advance, sign up

for the next week's meals and only choose those when they will be in, hence reducing the overall cost with weekly billing that changes depending on the number of meals ordered.

Maybe more agencies could be set up which billet students with metropolitan families which have been screened with clear parameters in place about cost to the student, what is included and the responsibilities of the student. This would appeal far more to some families than renting a room from a stranger from a private advertisement. Consider this like a longer term version of air bnb.

Culturally, many of the more remote communities find the idea of their children living away from home very confronting culturally. Potentially, we could learn from AFL clubs who have developed their own successful transition programs for both their indigenous and non-indigenous younger players who either move to the city or move interstate.

6.8.5 What can be done to address the directional flow of regional, rural and remote students towards cities?

6.9.3 What can be done to address the directional flow of regional, rural and remote students moving to cities for further education and/or training?

Looking firstly at schools, greater investment in country schooling to keep students in their communities for longer would be beneficial. The same can be said of investing in country communities generally in terms of availability of services and agencies. Locally produced solutions for communities often work better than centrally produced ones as they have local ownership.

Many people seek opportunities and education for themselves and their children which they see will best help their futures. Investing money into the rural and remote sector for specialist teaching and resources might help with educational outcomes but sometimes parents move towards cities for or with their children to access experiences and opportunities, which is something different. Providing a balance between travelling to Perth or regional centres to get those experiences and opportunities versus providing them locally is a challenge, most often due to cost either way.

In terms of employment opportunities, there are examples of medium sized businesses setting up in rural communities who have a weekly drive in-drive out workforce from Perth, while others live locally. They can afford to pay extra to employees as they saved significant money on leasing buildings compared to Perth prices. Possibly more incentives need to be offered to businesses to relocate to rural areas where practical.

Comment was also made that maybe nothing should be done if you want students to compete on a level playing field. Tertiary education and workplace opportunities in the city are just too strong of a pull for the majority of rural and remote communities to compete with. Others commented that some do return later in after several years away – this happens when there are job and social opportunities that appear for them.

ATTACHMENT 1: WADHSAA BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2017

The information below briefly summarises the projects nominated in 2017. Please contact the schools involved for more specific information

SCHOOL	PROJECT
Cocos Island (Winner)	<p>CIDHS Home Island students speak English as a second language. In their home environment English is not usually spoken. The Rasa Cocos program was developed to provide the students with a genuine purpose and opportunity to practice speaking English. It also fosters leadership and builds confidence. Guests are encouraged to ask the students plenty of questions about the cooking, their lives and their culture. By immersing students (2 per week plus any interested student during their lunch break) in a rich Standard Australian English (SAE) environment we aim to develop basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). Guests help prepare traditional Islander foods under the guidance of Home Island elders. The experience concludes with a delicious shared meal. The initiative gives an insight into Home Island culture, access rarely gained by visiting tourists. Students proudly host the event and act as interpreters. The program has fostered excellent partnership with community and innovation (Indian Ocean Group Training, parents, Tourism Centre, all the tourist accommodation providers). We are also marketing our school with the community which promotes a positive image. Rasa Cocos will be profiled on channel 9, Destinations WA, 30th July.</p> <p>OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE</p> <p>Recognises the development/implementation of curriculum that supports student learning: The development of oral language is a school priority and this program focusses successfully on the secondary cohort and gives genuine purpose for the informal use of SAE.</p> <p>Promotes an initiative involving the school in partnership with the community: The school was in need of a positive community based program that promoted culture, community involvement and improved student outcomes Rasa Cocos has provided that vehicle.</p> <p>Demonstrated planned educational innovation: The program represents true educational innovation impacting positively on student outcomes, developing relationships and sharing culture while not impacting on existing school timetabling.</p> <p>Promotes an image that positively represents District High Schools: We operate in a challenging educational and geographical location, the program has allowed visitors to our beautiful island an insight into the challenges students face while also allowing them to share their culture. Comments received in our visitor book validate the positive image the program represents for regional and remote DHSs. The program is sustainable.</p>
Dongara (Commendation)	<p>Student Exit Data identified parents were sending their children to Geraldton schools due to broader curriculum opportunities and in general these schools are in the Private Sector. As a result of this information and the focus on STEM by the WA and Federal Governments, the Secondary Curriculum Team (all of the secondary</p>

	<p>teachers) committed to STEM as a focus area years 7-10 in 2016. This focus includes but is not limited to; staff and students working collaboratively on cross curricula STEM learning opportunities, promotion of academic rigour and student achievement, a Robotics program, 3D printer and a Secondary STEM Expo. A highlight of the school calendar over the past two years has been the year 7-12 STEM Expo. The Expo showcases to the school and wider community our student work in STEM, all other curriculum areas and also includes our VETiS programs. The school and wider community are invited to the Expo with a focus on year 4- 6 families to provide them with quality and accurate information about our secondary school program. The school also works in partnership worked with school and community stakeholders such as the School Board, the Shire of Irwin and the local newspaper to support and advertise/promote the Expo in a positive light. This has seen a significant increase in the retention of students from years 6 to 7 and 10 to 11.</p>
<p>Jerramungup (Commendation)</p>	<p>It was decided to offer an invitation for the senior room students and their teachers of our smaller surrounding level 3 schools the opportunity to come together once a fortnight and be grouped so that different teachers could work with a range of students, and also give the students the opportunity to see and use the facilities that Jerramungup has on offer. From this concept the Fitzgerald Cluster was born consisting of Jerramungup, Gairdner, Bremer Bay, Ongerup and Borden Primary Schools. The idea has evolved over time and not only has it benefited the students but it has also given the opportunity for our schools to become a part of the highly collaborative Fitzgerald Cluster. The cluster has also through collaboration by the senior room teachers developed a scope and sequence aligned with the Western Australian Curriculum which has helped the teachers in the cluster with their teaching in multi-age group classes. We feel that this project promoted an image that positively represents District High Schools by showcasing what we have to offer to not only students but parents in the wider community. We also feel we have been able to recognise the development/implementation of curriculum that supports student learning through collaboration with all of the teachers involved, led by the Deputy Principal to develop a usable scope and sequence which directly supports what our teachers are trying to work with in their classrooms.</p>
<p>Roleystone</p>	<p>Like most schools, Roleystone CC has a large proportion of children that in the past have been left behind academically, socially, emotionally or physically because of an inability to intervene in the early years. With a school target of “no child that has been at the college since Kindergarten will below National Minimum Standard in Year 3”, the college has developed an early intervention team to meet the needs of children and teachers in the early years. With our DHS model, we will then reap the benefits over the coming years as these children move through the school. This is a complete change in the way the college allocates its physical, financial and human resources. The college has increased the amount of time allocated to School Psychologist as a part of this project, contracted speech and occupational therapists, increased EA support and increased support in gross motor development through the</p>

	<p>introduction of Physical Education classes in Fundamental Movement Skills in KP. Every child that enters at K will be screened, issues identified, teachers and parents informed and strategies developed to be used in the classroom to ensure every child has every opportunity to progress at an optimal rate.</p> <p>By covering academic (classroom teacher and EA), social/emotional (psychologist), verbal/linguistic (speech) and physical (OT) issues, all aspects of the development of young people are addressed. All K and P teachers have a full time EA (including planning/DOTT time) as well as a shared EA across the 4xK and 3xP classes. This innovative strategy has been developed within the resources of the college and the flexibility that comes with a one line budget as an Independent Public School.</p>
Dowerin	<p>To encourage students to strive to develop social and civic responsibility we have worked hard over the last 4 years to improve the profile of our Student Leadership Team (SLT); having them engage in leadership development and participate in meaningful school and wider community decision making and events. Initially the SLT (made up of students from Year 3 to 10) was in two clear divisions: class representatives and faction captains, with no clear roles and responsibilities or link between the two roles. The SLT now meets at a minimum of once per fortnight to discuss student issues and ideas, and organise student events and charity days. They also host formal parent assemblies, emcee the end of year Presentation Evening, and coordinate the presentation of student behaviour points at weekly student assemblies. To promote alliance to school factions the SLT has developed the 'Stirrest Cup' where faction points are awarded for a variety of sporting, behavioural, academic and artistic challenges. In 2017 a trophy is being purchased to be awarded to the winning faction at the end of the year. Opportunities for the SLT team to be involved in meaningful school and community decision making events has resulted in quarterly evening meetings with the school administration team and representatives from the School Board and P & C. The SLT is also representing school students at a series of community forums to develop a plan for the Shire for the next 5 years.</p>
Cunderdin	<p>Since 2012, we have systematically tackled challenges and addressed issues whilst building a positive school culture. To achieve this, we developed a strong foundation of high expectations (both behaviourally and academically), implemented effective and innovative whole school practices, provided excellent pastoral care, employed and retained expert high quality staff whilst building upon our excellent facilities and the quality and quantity of extra-curricular opportunities provided to students. The creation of our team culture has meant that any challenge or obstacle we met was dealt with in a solution focused approach by staff that are resilient, flexible, collaborative and willing to be part of the change we needed to implement. This outstanding group of people have made amazing progress towards the Department of Education and CDHS's vision, over a relative short period of time. We are proud to be a District High School and happily utilise the numerous advantages there</p>

	<p>are to being a school like ours. We have maintained our five Secondary Specialist Teachers to ensure the sustainability of our Secondary Program by utilising their expert skills as DOTT providers within the Primary school. Our high performing staff, constantly push the envelope and look for ways to extend and develop our country kids.</p> <p>Our school is a learning family, where our strong country values and commitment to educational excellence has been the backbone of our success.</p>
Boyup Brook	<p>In order to create a Mental Health Action team, our school looked beyond the school walls and decided to create a “Community” team under the umbrella of Mind Matters. By doing this were able to address the needs of our school and community and help to create strong links between the two. We selected a representative from our school and then identified interested key players to form the group. This included our local doctor, Community Resource Manager and local business woman/parent. Our group meets regularly and aims to develop a community and school culture that has a proactive and supportive approach to mental health. We have begun the journey by collecting data regarding mental health in Boyup Brook. This gave us a clear path and direction for our group and also some baseline data. We have identified the need for both mental health awareness and for support for those suffering mental health difficulties, but also the significant need for connections within the town. The inclusion of the doctor in the school and activities such as Mental Health Week events have been significant developments in both our town and the DHS. We think this group is a significant change from the methods schools traditionally for mental health and wellbeing. By creating a community group we have been able to look beyond our school walls and make real changes in our students’ lives. It has also strengthened our connection with the community which was desperately needed. Our involvement in this group has created some positive conversations about our School and has lifted our profile in the community and also in the eyes of the local Shire.</p>
Pemberton	<p>The Kitchen Garden Program is the ‘baby’ of Jo Ryan, Paul Griffiths and Kevin Jones. Together they plan and deliver hands-on project learning opportunities to our Year One – Ten students. “STEAMing” (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) In The Garden” enables students to experience holistic real-life learning in their own living laboratory. It features a variety of fruit, vegetables, herbs and animal life. The chickens, worms and the calves (on occasion) have been a big hit with the students. Each week students in Years One to Six are allocated two hours Kitchen Garden Time. In this time students will be either working in the garden (plant, weed, pick, prune, etc.) or in the Kitchen (cooking with our amazing produce). The groups rotate every week, so the students can experience the process of planting a seed, maintaining optimal conditions, watching it grow, harvesting, cooking with the product and share in the tasting with classmates. All stages cater for multiple</p>

	<p>learning styles and are integrated into other learning areas (English, Math, Science, Humanities and Health). Excess produce is placed in our school stall for community members to purchase; the stall is often emptied very quickly when word gets out that we have restocked. The funds from the stall are put back into the garden, for example; purchasing new seeds, equipment or resources.</p>