Report on the parent survey of the relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools

June 2012
Introduction

In December 2011, the Western Australian State Government announced its decision to move Year 7 students to secondary schools from 2015. The decision was made among varying stakeholder positions, reflections from the Catholic Education system that had already implemented this move in 2008, and several reports, both positive and negative. The Minister for Education, Dr Elizabeth Constable, said the decision was necessary and made for the educational benefit of public school children. In a press conference at the time, the Minister stated,

“This is about equality. West Australian public school students deserve the same advantages as their peers in private and Catholic schools, and other schools across the country. This will ensure WA children are not left behind.”

Despite this rationale, there has been continued community and Government debate on this issue over a number of years. In 2007 the WA Department of Education (DoE) released a report on the feasibility of moving Year 7’s labeled, “The Future Placement of Year 7 Students in Western Australian Public Schools: A Study,” which made several important findings that are still valid today. Most concerning, the report found that there was “no evidence at either the State or national levels that outcomes improved when Year 7 students are in secondary settings.” The report also states that students may have a greater capacity to be engaged when placed in secondary settings and that quality teaching and learning experiences are the “most significant influences on student outcomes.” In regard to infrastructure, relocating Year 7’s was deemed unfeasible at the time, with 85 secondary sites needing capital works investment. It is interesting to note that the DoE acknowledges the detrimental effect this restructure could have on primary schools and local communities, a point strongly made by parents in WACSSO’s survey. In its conclusion, the report makes a powerful statement that, “it is not feasible to move all Year students into secondary settings in the foreseeable future because of the high costs, the capacity of the Department to provide teachers and the concerns of rural and remote communities.” As the DoE has not publicly released a new position since this report, one must wonder on what evidence the State Government based their decision to relocate Year 7’s?

A 2009 report, “Managing the Move,” by Dr Anne Coffey from the University of Notre Dame provides a detailed insight into the parent and student experiences of 6 metropolitan Catholic high schools during the first year of their cohort reorganization to include Year 7’s in secondary

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1 Ministerial Statement
2 Department of Education p4
3 Department of Education p4
4 Department of Education p4
5 Department of Education p27
settings. “Managing the Move” concludes that Year 7 students adjusted well to the secondary school environment and that parents “were generally comfortable with the move of their child to secondary school.”

Coffey also makes several important observations in regards to ensuring quality teacher training, consistency of curriculum across the year 6 students in primary ‘feeder’ schools and the importance of “clearly defining the curriculum leadership responsibilities for the year seven coordinator and heads of learning areas.”

Several important recommendations are made including a strong focus on pastoral care for students, regular communication to parents, quality ongoing professional development for teachers, establishing formal links between primary and secondary schools and consideration to the provision of a designated ‘Year 7 area.’

Of particular interest was the recommendation that “schools recognise the crucial role of the year 7 coordinator and give judicious consideration to the selection of the appropriate person.” Dr Coffey’s report provides a valuable insight and finds a generally positive response from both parents and students in regard to the move, however it is important to note that her survey responses were limited to schools in the metropolitan area. While WACSSO’s survey results show similar trends from metropolitan families, the experience of rural and remote families present many more challenges and issues.

The Isolated Children’s Parent Association (ICPA), which represents parents of rural and remote public and private students, is against the decision. During their annual State Conference on the 23rd of March 2012, members raised several negative implications of relocating Year 7’s. Many of these issues related to the emotional and financial effects associated with sending students away to boarding school, especially in the context of their age. ICPA members agreed with the Minister’s decision to allow some rural primary schools to continue teaching Year 7 students for a period after 2015, but argued that this should remain a permanent structure. There were also several concerns raised in regard to the capacity of rural high schools to cope with extra students and one motion sought a guarantee “from the Minister for Education that rural high schools will be appropriately staffed and resourced (prior to 2015), to ensure that students will not be disadvantaged by the introduction of Year 7 to secondary education.”

Many of the challenges raised by the ICPA resonate with the responses from rural parents in WACSSO’s survey.

The Parents and Friends Federation of Western Australia (PFFWA) provided valuable insight into how parent organisations in the Catholic Education sector reacted and addressed their Year 7 move. During consultation with PFFWA Executive Officer and Affiliates Liaison Officer, the importance of successfully engaging the parent community before, during and after the implementation period was seen as vital. PFFWA argued that schools need to keep parents regularly informed, ensure a strong anti-bullying policy and take steps to involve them in the transition process. Of particular interest was their reflection that providing some level of separation between Year 7 and other secondary students was favoured by both parents and children. PFFWA argue that engagement with parents and students during the relocation must originate from the school at a local level.

6 Coffey, A p5

7 Coffey, A p5

8 ICPA
The Western Australian Primary Principals Association (WAPPA) and Western Australian Secondary Schools Executive Association (WASSEA) have varying views of the move. In a 2006 position paper, “The Placement of Year Sevens,” WAPPA states that it opposes moving Year 7 students into high schools in the absence of convincing educational rationales. The paper also states that socially and emotionally Year 7’s would be better off in primary schools and that the move would devastate many smaller rural schools. WASSEA supports the decision to include Year 7 students in secondary schools where they will receive access to specialist teachers. WASSEA notes that the half-year cohort means students are ½ year older and that there was no change in the Primary School curriculum to cater for this. In addition, the “Australian Curriculum is predicated on Year 7’s being in Secondary Schools” and therefore these students will be best catered for educationally in these settings.

Nationally, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania already place their Year 7’s in secondary settings and Queensland announced their decision to do the same only months before WA. Queensland is a particularly interesting case in comparison with our State, as the level of community consultation and planning by their State Government far exceeds that of WA. The Queensland State government commissioned a publicly available whitepaper on the relocation of Year 7’s, labeled “A Flying Start for Queensland Children,” sought broad consultation on this paper and has ensured a large amount of information is available on their Department of Education website. They have also introduced Year 7’s into 20 pilot schools to ensure that any major issues during transition can be addressed before the vast majority of schools undergo the change. During discussions with the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens’ Associations (QCPCA) they report to have been “involved in close consultation with the State Government and are represented on a number of stakeholder groups.” Overall they have been satisfied with the level of parent and community engagement on this issue.

**WACSSO’s Position**

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc (WACSSO) Policy section G.9.2 states that WACSSO does not support the decision to relocate Year 7’s in the absence of extensive community consultation and evidence which suggests student outcomes will improve as a result. In light of the State Governments decision, our focus has shifted to ensuring that the relocation is well planned, well resourced and undertaken for sound educational reasons.

**Aims**

9 WAPPA p1
10 WASSEA p1
11 WASSEA p1
12 QCPCA
The core business of WACSSO is to provide a voice for parents of public school children. The WA State Government has provided limited opportunities for parents and families of public school children to be consulted on the decision to relocate Year 7 students to secondary schools. Many affiliates have expressed disappointment with this, one making the statement that, “What is obvious is that the decision to move year 7’s to high school is not a simple process for those of us in country areas, and it is a decision we would appreciate our views being considered in.”

In response to this, WACSSO broadly surveyed parents, affiliate P&C’s and other individuals in metropolitan and rural areas across WA in regard to the relocation of Year 7’s. Over 220 parents, individuals and P&C associations responded. Feedback was also received from several schools, through the WACSSO Facebook page and various phone calls.

The purpose of the WACSSO survey was to provide an opportunity for parents and families of public school children across WA to put forward their views, opinions and ideas in regard to this issue. The aim of this report is to bring together that information to assist the State Government, WACSSO and other stakeholders to ensure that the transition of Year 7’s is as smooth as possible for parents and students in public schools.

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Parent Survey on Relocating Year Seven’s: Results

Overview

The following report reflects the views of respondents to WACSSO’s “Parent Survey on the Relocation of Year 7’s to High School.” The majority of respondents agreed that moving Year 7’s to secondary schools is academically better for the child, however the emotional and financial cost, especially for rural families, far outweighs the benefits. As the table below shows, the majority of respondents do not believe that relocating Year 7’s to secondary schools is a positive initiative.

The following table shows the response to the question: *Is moving Year 7 students to high school a positive initiative?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues Raised by Parents

The following issues were raised by respondents in regard to the decision to relocate Year 7’s to secondary schools.

Consultation

An overwhelming majority of parents did not believe that the State Government had adequately consulted them in regard to the decision to relocate Year 7’s. In regards to the following statement, *‘the State Government has adequately consulted parents and carers on the issue of moving Year 7’s to High School,* 82 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, 12 percent were unsure and 6 percent agreed or strongly agreed. Many parents, especially those from rural and remote areas, felt that their concerns had not been heard, with one respondent stating, “I am disappointed and very angry with the lack of consultation and total disregard to
parent’s opinions and concerns.”14 Another parent stated that, “What is obvious is that the
decision to move Year 7’s to high school is not a simple process for those of us in country
areas, and it is a decision we would appreciate our views being considered in.”15 While some
parents did agree that the Minister for Education had visited some schools, most believed that in
light of the broad and serious impact relocating Year 7’s has on schools and communities, not
enough consultation has been undertaken. Respondents from rural communities stressed that
their situation is very different to those in metropolitan areas and that WA’s unique size and
remoteness, which fosters a range of varying family circumstances, needs to be taken into
account in any consultation process.

Conclusion: The State Government has not adequately consulted parents, especially
those from rural and remote areas, in regard to relocating Year 7 students to secondary
schools.

Recommendation: The State Government undertake extensive consultation with rural
and remote parents and schools to fully ascertain the impact moving year 7’s to high
school in 2015 will have on families, schools and communities. The State Government
should be open to delaying the transition of Yr 7 to high schools in some areas to 2018
and beyond.

Recommendation: The Minister for Education, through the Department of Education
ensures that parents are kept informed of the progress of the relocation planning
through regular and meaningful communication and that parent’s have an opportunity to
provide input and feedback during this process to ensure the discrete needs of regions
are understood, acknowledge and acted upon.

Recommendation: That schools investigate and implement strategies to facilitate and
promote regular communication and engagement with parents before, during and after
transition.

Age

The issue of age has been debated throughout the many discussions on relocating Year 7’s.
WACSSO’s survey found that only a minority of parents believe that Year 7’s are emotionally,
socially and physically ready to be part of a secondary school. An overwhelming majority of
parents believe that Year 7 (or 12 years old) is too young for a child to be in secondary school,
especially for boys who are generally less mature than girls. Parents questioned whether their
child would be psychologically and emotionally ready to deal with the increased stress,
pressures and influences of a secondary school environment. In particular parents do not want
their child exposed to the negative influences, such as drugs and alcohol, of older students.
Parents agreed that secondary schools are ‘teen’ environments and not suitable for ‘children.’
82 percent of respondents to WACSSO’s survey wanted a separate area available for Year 7’s.

14 WACSSO Survey

15 WACSSO Survey
The following table shows the response to the question: *During school and in particular during recess and lunch breaks, would you prefer your child to be…?*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is a separate Year 7 area needed?</th>
<th>Largely separated from the other year groups in secondary schools (36%)</th>
<th>A separate area provided within school grounds, but also opportunities to mix with other year groups (46%)</th>
<th>No separate area needed (18%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Largely separated from the other year groups in secondary schools (36%)</td>
<td>A separate area provided within school grounds, but also opportunities to mix with other year groups (46%)</td>
<td>Some parents were completely against the prospect of sending their young Year 7 away to boarding school and believed it would be to the detriment of the child. With the onset of puberty, this is a crucial age in the child’s development and in this context parents were strongly opposed to the idea of their child leaving the family home. Parents reported that there was a ‘severe lack’ of local district high school options available in rural areas and most had no choice but to send their child to a boarding school in regional centre or Perth. As parents did not believe it was suitable for such a young child to be away from parental influence, some reported that the mother will move with their child to a regional centre or Perth; effectively splitting up the family unit. A comment from one respondent summed up the views of rural families,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I am extremely concerned about taking our children away from their homes and communities 1 year earlier than necessary. Given the severe lack of acceptable education options for high school in our area, we will be forced to send our eldest daughter away. This will have a massive impact on our family both emotionally and financially. I believe it will set many year 7s back, due to their immaturity and dependence, by being removed from their families. A number of mothers in our community will move with their year 7 student, separating the family and taking younger siblings away from country primary schools. Our children are being forced to grow up earlier than necessary.&quot; 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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It was interesting to note that in some rural areas primary schools are given the option of retaining its Year 7 students until 2018. While parents agreed that keeping their Year 7 in primary settings in some remote areas would benefit the family unit, they also commented that it may also be to the educational detriment of the child. As one parent states, “If there are very few students left at the school, how can it be a suitable place for our children to attend?"

Conclusion: There was genuine concern from parents that Year 7 students are too young to belong in secondary school settings for a variety of academic, social, psychological and emotional reasons.

Conclusion: The majority of parents wanted a separate area available for Year 7 students during breaks.

Recommendation: The State Government adequately invests in the provision of Year 7 Transitional Support Staff at every high school to assist year 7 students adjust to the social, emotional and academic challenges faced by moving to high school.

Parent Concerns

Student social issues and safety were the areas that parents raised most concerns in regard to Year 7’s becoming part of the secondary school environment. The following table shows the response to the question: Do you have any anxieties related to your child moving to Year 7 in secondary school in the following areas? (note: participants could respond to one, several or none of the options.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Homework</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation (Finding class/using lockers/etc)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate class rooms/facilities at high schools</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between parent and school/teachers</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Issues

Social issues, in particular bullying, was rated as the biggest concern of parents. Many respondents questioned whether their child was emotionally and psychologically ready to be
socially successful and had concerns that if they weren’t, it could affect their capacity to be educationally engaged. There was wide concern of the possibility that students would experience or be exposed to an increase in bullying in secondary school. While parents accepted that this could be the case in any transition to secondary school, many worried that the risk was potentially magnified given the younger age of Year 7’s. Some believed that students will be forced to ‘grow up too fast.’ A strong, school based pastoral care strategy is believed to be the best method of ensuring any student social issues are dealt with effectively. Orientation programs that include anti-bullying education, strategies to ensure social inclusion and a ‘buddy’ system were considered as effective preventative methods. The presence of strong leadership through a Year 7 coordinator and pastoral care staff, chaplains and support staff was considered important in creating a welcoming environment for students. Parents also suggested that schools consider running sporting and academic programs, and social events to encourage students to ‘make friends.’ Overall, parents generally commented that many secondary schools had very good orientation programs in place already, but wanted to ensure that schools considered the younger age of Year 7’s when implementing these strategies.

Conclusion: There was genuine parent concern that Year 7 students were at higher risk of developing social issues in secondary school settings than in primary settings.

Recommendation: That schools appoint a Year 7 ‘leader’ and supporting pastoral care staff to ensure the wellbeing of all students.

Safety

Safety was also a primary concern with many parents questioning whether it was suitable for 12 year old children to be in the same environment as 18 year old teenagers. While it is generally accepted that the majority of older students will be suitable role models for younger students, it is feared that some teenagers could be a negative influence on younger, impressionable Year 7’s. The issue of ‘cyber’ bullying was considered to be more prominent in secondary schools and several media reports have created concern for the safety of students in these environments. Many also believed that the risk of students becoming involved in drugs, alcohol or other criminal activities was greater in secondary school settings and stressed the importance of schools enforcing strong policy in these areas. Parents generally felt that a primary school environment was safer for a 12 year old child. An ongoing drugs and alcohol, violence and anti-social behavior education program, along with strong leadership, was considered an effective preventative measure to ensure student safety.

Conclusion: There was genuine parent concern that Year 7 students were at greater risk of exposure to negative safety issues such as drugs, alcohol and violence, in secondary settings.

Recommendation: High schools should be supported and funded to ensure they can develop appropriate policies and programs to support Year 7’s in a high school environment to minimize exposure to bullying and anti-social behaviour, by older students.

Recommendation: High schools be supported and funded (where necessary) to provide discrete areas for Year 7 students to socialise at break times.
Recommendation: That schools investigate and implement strategies that educate students on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

Recommendation: That schools implement strong anti-bullying and anti-violence policies to ensure the social and physical wellbeing of all students.

Parent-Teacher/School Relationship

WACSSO’s survey found that respondents highly valued good parent-teacher relationships and feared a breakdown of communication in secondary schools due to their child having several teachers, instead of just one in primary settings. Parents accept that this is a normal circumstance for any student making the primary-secondary transition, however because of the younger age of Year 7’s, strong communication with the school is vital. Several suggestions on strategies to engage parents before, after and during the transition were made. Regular, practical and detailed information in the form of letters, phone calls and meetings, from the school on the status of the child was considered very important. Parents want assurances that schools will inform them of any social, academic or behavioral issues affecting their child. Regular parent-teacher meetings would help to ensure that parents are engaged in their child’s education and orientation days for parents would give families an opportunity to meet teaching staff before school begins. A partnership between the Parents and Citizens Association and the school to facilitate engagement with new families was suggested. Overall, parents want to be assured that “schools will listen to their concerns, not just be taken as parent ‘complaints.’”17 For many parents, having their Year 7 in secondary school is a ‘daunting’ prospect and knowing what is happening with their child during school hours is crucial to ensuring they can be an active participant in their education.

Conclusion: Parents highly value strong communication and relationships with schools and teachers.

Conclusion: Parents feared that parent-teacher communication would reduce in secondary school settings.

Recommendation: The Department of Education examine best practice undertaken at high schools in terms of teacher-parent communication to assist all high schools in developing and improving their communication protocols.

Recommendation: WACSSO will investigate strategies to provide focused assistance to affiliated high school P&C and work with them to develop a range of strategies to increase parental engagement, in particular to develop strategies to assist and engage parents of Yr 7 students.

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Infrastructure

Current overcrowding of several metropolitan high schools, lack of infrastructure to accommodate new students and lack of investment by the State Government in rural district high schools have generated widespread concern from respondents. Parents generally wanted to be assured that overcrowding in secondary schools would not occur and that facilities would be of high standard. One parent stated,

“I have no concerns with the concept of transitioning Year 7 to high school and understand the rationale. My concern is that substantial planning is required to ensure that the change is implemented well. I believe that this planning should have already started and there should be consultation with stakeholders along the way.”

Issues raised in regard to infrastructure include:

- The capacity of existing secondary schools to accommodate the large influx of new students.
- The capacity for new secondary schools to be built.
- Ensuring that any capital works to accommodate new students is well planned and not ad-hoc in nature.
- Ensuring that any temporary buildings (transportables) are replaced by permanent facilities in a timely manner.
- Ensuring that any lack of infrastructure does not compromise an acceptable teacher-student ratio.
- The severe lack of public high school boarding facilities in the metropolitan area.

Conclusion: Parents wanted a general re-assurance that all secondary schools could adequately accommodate an extra cohort of Year 7 students, especially in light of the ‘half-cohort’ ending.

District High Schools

A heavy investment by the State Government in district high schools and regional boarding facilities was continually raised as a possible answer to many of the emotional and financial stresses of sending children away for secondary school faced by rural families. District high schools are generally closer to families residing in rural areas and negate the need for many parents to send children away to Perth or other centers. Rural families were generally more accepting of the travel or boarding costs in sending their child to district high school if it were in the region they reside. In addition, there was a general belief that Year 7’s were safer and socially better off in district high schools due to the absence of senior students.

Unfortunately, many of these district high schools would need a heavy capital works investment in order to accommodate Year 7’s. Likewise, many of these district high schools do not posses boarding facilities and those which do, would need further investment to accommodate an extra

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cohort. In addition, district high’s currently suffer from a reputation and perception that they provide sub-standard education largely for the lower socio-economic domains of rural areas. Despite these circumstances, respondents strongly urged the State Government to investigate directing resources into district high schools to offer rural families a viable educational option other than boarding schools in metropolitan areas or regional centers.

Conclusion: Rural and remote parents see District High Schools as a potential viable option to send their Year 7 students, providing an investment from the State Government is made in them.

Recommendation: The State Government urgently commits funds to the enable District High Schools to accommodate Yr 7 students and boarders and invest in increasing their capacity to deliver a comprehensive curriculum.

Boarding facilities

It was generally accepted that there is a severe lack of public school boarding facility options in metropolitan areas which needed to be addressed. It was also noted that country boarding facilities required additional investment to ensure they have the capacity to accommodate extra students. Many parents will send their child to boarding school made the comment that they would prefer to keep their child in the public system for their secondary education if public boarding options were readily available. One respondent commented that,

"It is to the detriment of the government school system that there is a total lack of public boarding hostels in the metropolitan area. Many parents in my community would rather send their children to a successful public school in Perth, but the only options come from the private system."19

It was noted that while limited public school boarding facilities do exist in metropolitan areas, these are mostly already at capacity.

Conclusion: Parents noted a lack of public school boarding facilities in the metropolitan area.

Recommendation: The State Government conducts a review of current public school boarding options, specifically in the metropolitan area, and commits to the construction of more boarding facilities at public high schools.

Financial Implications

WACSSO’s survey received an overwhelming response from rural families in regard to the financial stress placed on families in relocating Year 7’s to secondary schools. While metropolitan respondents generally felt that there would be minimal or no extra cost, those from rural areas held a different view. With many farming families experiencing tough times and the

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ongoing effects of the financial crisis, an additional year of boarding for some students and increased travel for others were deemed to place considerable financial strain on some families. Some families may be forced to leave town in search of cheaper education options. For those who remain, costs incurred from parents visiting their child in boarding school. Parents urged the State Government to investigate the provision of subsidies or financial assistance for families in these circumstances.

The table below shows the response to the question: *Will your child have to undergo increased travel time to get to and from school?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased travel time?</th>
<th>Yes (62%)</th>
<th>No (38%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
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</table>

Conclusion: Many parents, especially those in rural and remote areas, will face financial implications as a direct result of the relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools.

Recommendations: The State Government provide financial assistance to rural and remote families who will struggle to meet the additional financial costs of sending their Year 7 child to a District High School or Boarding School.

Rural Communities

Many respondents commented that, for rural communities, the effects of relocating Year 7’s would have widespread implications extending beyond the family unit or secondary schools. The mass exodus of the Year 7 cohort, along with many parents who wish to accompany their child, will have a dramatic effect on the population of many small rural communities. This may significantly affect the social and sporting culture of small towns, which often forms the fabric of rural communities. Small business will also experience a loss in profit, with more parents leaving or making regular visits to Perth which provides the opportunity to spend their money elsewhere. Some businesses suggested they may no longer be able to operate. One respondent commented that,

“This decision has been made to the absolute detriment of country families and communities. Our tiny primary school is the only school in our town, so moving year 7’s to high school will mean our children leaving their homes and the district a year earlier.”
This decision essentially signs the death warrant for country families, country primary schools, junior sport and country communities.\textsuperscript{20}

Others suggested that, with many mothers accompanying their child away due to the young age of Year 7 students, the number of woman in small communities may decrease. Overall, the relocation of Year 7 students would jeopardise many small rural communities and, in extreme cases, may see the demise of some towns altogether.

**Conclusion:** The relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools will have significant impacts on the population of some rural and remote communities. This impact will negatively affect communities financially, socially and culturally.

**Recommendation:** The State Government should, with urgency, conduct an analysis of the social and familial impacts rural and remote communities may face with the transition of Yr 7’s to high school. The State Government should investigate strategies to address these issues.

**Primary Schools**

The loss of the Year 7 cohort will also have an adverse affect on many rural primary schools, many of which will be re-classified. When schools are re-classified to a lower level, they lose resources and staff. For some very small schools that loose a significant number of students it may no longer be viable for them operate. Respondents were concerned that a loss to primary resources may negatively impact on the educational outcomes of students and the capacity of primary schools to provide their students opportunities such as specialist programs.

**Conclusion:** The relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools may force the closure of some small primary schools.

**Conclusion:** The relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools will have negative implications on primary school students in regard to the programs or resources available to them.

**Recommendation:** The State Government commit to ensuring that no primary school will close with the loss of Year 7 students to high school.

**Recommendation:** The State Government commit to ensuring that no Government primary school will lose specialist programs or resources with the relocation of year 7s to high school.

**Staffing and Teacher Training**

The provision and ongoing professional development for both primary and secondary staff teaching Year 7 students was regarded by many respondents as critically important. With

\textsuperscript{20} WACSSO Survey
teacher quality having a significant impact on student outcome, many parents believe significant investment in this area is needed. Whether they were teaching primary or secondary students beforehand, all teachers would need specific training on the new curriculum that takes into account the academic and emotional level of Year 7 students. Many respondents reported that their school was likely to suffer from a shortage of staff and that further investment from the State Government to attract new teachers was needed. Overall, parents wanted assurances that teaching staff will be of high quality and classroom sizes would remain at adequate levels.

**Conclusion:** Parents seek assurances that there will be an adequate number of high quality teaching staff at both primary and secondary level during and after the transition of Year 7 students to secondary schools.

**Recommendations:** The State Government ensures sufficient funding and training is available to all teachers in the delivery of the National Curriculum.

**Recommendation:** The State Government ensures there are sufficient, appropriately trained year 7 teachers in high school be the commencement of 2015.

**Positives**

Parents commented on several key benefits to relocating Year 7’s to secondary schools. Most agreed that their child will be academically better off due to their ability to access specialty teachers and subjects, along with improved curriculum and higher resourcing. Many believe their child will be challenged at a higher level and receive greater opportunities to improve themselves academically. Some parents also commented that secondary schools present greater social or sporting opportunities. The introduction of the National Curriculum and the successful relocation of Year 7’s to secondary schools in states such as Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania were also cited as supporting arguments. In fact, some respondents believed that the move was overdue with one stating,

“About time! Finally my kids will have the full offer of subjects from year 7 like the rest of the country. Parents are only over-reacting to what has occurred successfully interstate for decades and the decision will stop the divide between public and private split.”

Overall, WACSSO’s survey found that parents generally supported the argument that relocating Year 7’s has the potential to raise student outcomes.

**Conclusion:** Many parents agreed that Year 7 students will be academically better positioned in secondary schools.

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Summary

WACSSO’s survey on relocating Year 7’s to secondary schools presented a range of issues and challenges this decision has generated. While parents generally agreed that the relocation would be of some academic merit for students, because of the challenges, especially those pertaining to financial and emotional stress, they did not support the decision. Many of the financial and emotional issues were significantly magnified for rural parents and it is interesting to note majority of parents who agreed with the move were from metropolitan areas, while the majority of those who disagreed were from rural locations. Parents feel that they have been left out of the consultation process in regard to this decision and that the State Government has not provided them with solid evidence, beyond citing the National Curriculum and the organisation of other States and Territories, to show how this move will be of academic or other benefit to students.

Moving forward, the State Government must address the issues outlined above to ensure a smooth transition for Year 7 students and their families to secondary schools. Consideration must be given to the younger age of the Year 7 cohort when conducting school planning. The success of this move for parents will rely on the State Government investment and the efforts of individual schools to address the concerns of families on a case by case basis. For rural families and communities in particular, this decision will have dramatic implications and the State Government must investigate how they will address these. Overall, a successful relocation of Year 7’s demands a strategy that is very well planned and resourced, takes into consideration the varying circumstances of WA families and ensures that all stakeholders are kept well informed and consulted throughout the process.
Conclusions

The State Government has not adequately consulted parents, especially those from rural and remote areas, in regard to relocating Year 7 students to secondary schools.

There was genuine concern from parents that Year 7 students are too young to belong in secondary school settings for a variety of academic, social, psychological and emotional reasons.

The majority of parents wanted a separate area available for Year 7 students during breaks.

There was genuine parent concern that Year 7 students were at higher risk of developing social issues in secondary school setting than in primary settings.

There was genuine parent concern that Year 7 students were at greater risk of exposure to negative safety issues such as drugs, alcohol and violence, in secondary settings.

Parents highly value strong communication and relationships with schools and teachers.

Parents feared that parent-teacher communication would reduce in secondary school settings.

Parents wanted a general re-assurance that all secondary schools could adequately accommodate an extra cohort of Year 7 students, especially in light of the ‘half-cohort’ ending.

Rural and remote parents see District High Schools as a potential viable option to send their Year 7 students, providing an investment from the State Government is made in them.

Parents noted a lack of public school boarding facilities in the metropolitan area.

Many parents, especially those in rural and remote areas, will face financial implications as a direct result of the relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools.

The relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools will have significant impacts on the population of some rural and remote communities. This impact will negatively affect communities financially, socially and culturally.

The relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools may force the closure of some small primary schools.

The relocation of Year 7 students to secondary schools will have negative implications on primary school students in regard to the programs or resources available to them.

Parents seek assurances that there will be an adequate number of high quality teaching staff at both primary and secondary level during and after the transition of Year 7 students to secondary schools.
Many parents agreed that Year 7 students will be academically better positioned in secondary schools.
Recommendations

State Government

The State Government undertake extensive consultation with rural and remote parents and schools to fully ascertain the impact moving year 7’s to high school in 2015 will have on families, schools and communities. The State Government should be open to delaying the transition of Yr 7 to high schools in some areas to 2018 and beyond.

The Minister for Education, through the Department of Education ensures that parents are kept informed of the progress of the relocation planning through regular and meaningful communication and that parent’s have an opportunity to provide input and feedback during this process to ensure the discrete needs of regions are understood, acknowledge and acted upon.

The State Government adequately invests in the provision of Year 7 Transitional Support Staff at every high school to assist year 7 students adjust to the social, emotional and academic challenges faced by moving to high school.

High schools should be supported and funded to ensure they can develop appropriate policies and programs to support Year 7’s in a high school environment to minimize exposure to bullying and anti-social behavior, by older students.

High schools be supported and funded (where necessary) to provide discrete areas for Year 7 students to socialise at break times.

The State Government conducts a review of current public school boarding options, specifically in the metropolitan area, and commits to construction more boarding facilities at public high schools.

The State Government urgently commits funds to the enable District High Schools to accommodate Yr 7 students and boarders and invest in increasing their capacity to deliver a comprehensive curriculum.

The State Government provide financial assistance to rural and remote families who will struggle to meet the additional financial costs of sending their Year 7 child to a District High School or Boarding School.

The State Government should, with urgency, conduct an analysis of the social and familial impacts rural and remote communities may face with the transition of Yr 7’s to high school.

The State Government commit to ensuring that no primary school will close with the loss of Year 7 students to high school.

The State Government commit to ensuring that no Government primary school will be loose specialist programs or resources with the relocation of year 7s to high school.
The State Government ensures sufficient funding and training is available to all teachers in the delivery of the National Curriculum.

The State Government ensures there are sufficient, appropriately trained year 7 teachers in high school be the commencement of 2015.

**Department of Education**

The Department of Education examine best practice undertaken at high schools in terms of teacher-parent communication to assist all high schools in developing and improving their communication protocols.

**Schools**

That schools investigate and implement strategies to facility and promote regular communication and engagement with parents before, during and after transition.

That schools appoint a Year 7 'leader' and supporting pastoral care staff to ensure the wellbeing of all students.

That schools investigate and implement strategies that educate students on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

That schools implement strong anti-bullying and anti-violence policies to ensure the social and physical wellbeing of all students.

**WACSSO**

Recommendation: WACSSO will investigate strategies to provide focused assistance to affiliated high school P&C and work with them to develop a range of strategies to increase parental engagement, in particular to develop strategies to assist and engage parents on Yr 7 students.
Survey Data

Do you have a child that will be in Year 7 in 2015?

Child entering High School in 2015?

- Yes (41%)
- No (59%)

In regards to the following statement, ‘the State Government has adequately consulted parents and carers on the issue of moving Year 7’s to High School,’ do you:

- Strongly Agree (Less than 1%)
- Agree (5%)
- Not Sure (12%)
- Disagree (24%)
- Strongly Disagree (58%)
In regard to the following statement, ‘moving Year 7 students to high school is a positive initiative,’ do you:

Are you currently a member of the P&C at your child’s primary school?

Currently a member of the P&C at your child's primary school?

Response from rural parents in regard to the question: "moving Year 7’s to high school is positive initiative?"

Response from metropolitan parents in regard to the question: "moving Year 7’s to high school is positive initiative?"
Do you intend to become a member of the P&C at your child’s high school?

Do you intend to become a P&C member at your child's high school?

- Yes (63%)
- No (37%)
Do you have any anxieties related to your child moving to Year 7 in secondary school in the following areas? (please tick all that apply, you may select more than one):

- Safety
- Increased Homework
- Organisation (Finding class/using lockers/etc)
- Social Issues
- Adequate class rooms/facilities at high schools
- Relationship between parent and school/teachers

During school and in particular during recess and lunch breaks, would you prefer your child to be:

- Largely separated from the other year groups in secondary schools (36%)
- A separate area provided within school grounds, but also opportunities to mix with other year groups (46%)
- No separate area needed (18%)
Will your child have to undergo increased travel time to get to and from school?

![Bar chart showing increased travel time]

- Yes (62%)
- No (38%)

Will you send your child away to attend school?

![Bar chart showing decision to send child away for school]

- Yes (39%)
- No (61%)
References

Coffey, Dr Anne (December 2009), Managing the Move. Report sent by email 22 February 2012.

Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of WA (ICPA) (March 23rd 2012), ICPA WA State Conference Agenda Motions, Sourced from ICPA State Conference March 2012

Minister for Education (December 2011), Major moves for year 7’s and pre-primary, December 2011

Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc (WACSSO), Parent Survey on the Relocation of Year 7 Students to High School, 2012

Western Australian Department of Education (February 2007), The future placement of year students in Western Australian public schools: A study.

Western Australian Primary Principals Association (WAPPA) (June 2006), The Placement of Year Sevens: A position paper, Received 2007

Western Australian Secondary Schools Executive Association (WASSEA), Year Seven Students in Secondary Schools, Document sent via email 28 May 2012.

Additional correspondence with the following schools and organisations:

Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens’ Associations (QCPCA)

Parents and Friends Federation of Western Australia

Beacon Primary School

Ellenbrook Secondary College

Atwell College