



THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL
ORGANISATIONS INC.

151 Royal Street, East Perth
Western Australia 6004
P.O. Box 6295, East Perth
Western Australia 6892

Telephone: (08) 9264 4000
Facsimile: (08) 9264 4948
Email: info@wacssso.wa.edu.au
Web: www.wacssso.wa.edu.au

2012-13 STATE ELECTION

WACSSO POSITION

PAPER

Introduction

On the 9th of March 2013, Western Australia will hold its State Government election. The election period provides an important opportunity for the WA Council of State School Organisations Inc (WACSSO) and its affiliates to lobby their position on key issues to political candidates, members and parties. This document sets the position of WACSSO on several key issues pertinent to education in WA.

The issues listed in this position paper are:

- Pride in the public education system
- Federal Review of Funding for Schools
- Information Communication Technology
- School support
- Independent Public Schools
- School council/board training
- Year 7 relocation to secondary school
- School dental clinics
- School based community health nurses
- Provision of crossing guards
- 40km/h all day speed zones around schools
- The Teacher Registration Board
- Re-introduction of school student subsidies
- Student welfare services

We hope this document is of assistance to affiliates, State Government, opposition and others seeking to know WACSSO's position on these key issues during the election period.

WACSSO encourages P&C's to use this position paper as an aid to lobby candidates within their local electorates on education issues relevant to their school community.

Lifting the profile of Public Education

Pride in the Public Education System

Preamble

Australia has an excellent public education system. While it is acknowledged through the Federal Review of Funding that it requires a more equitable and transparent funding model at a Federal level, and increased budget allocations at a State level, public schools still provide a high quality education for the vast majority of students.

Our public education system should be celebrated and Government schools should be seen as schools of choice for West Australian families.

WACSSO is not opposed to NAPLAN testing as a measure of student achievement to help guide schools target curriculum areas that require a more focused student, year group or school approach. However, WACSSO does not endorse the use of NAPLAN results as a form of league tables.

WACSSO supports the work of the Expert Review Group in assisting schools that are failing to deliver optimal outcomes and for determining best practice at schools that are performing at high levels of achievement. Whilst WACSSO acknowledges the need for transparency, the ERG reports that are published online for low performing schools do little to support the school or increase general confidence in the public school system.

WACSSO will actively continue to work to promote the excellent standard of education offered by our public schools. We acknowledge that good news stories do not always garner the attention of the media however there other alternatives to promote the achievements of public schools and their students.

Position

WACSSO recommends that the Department of Education, along with other stake holder organisations make every effort to maximize the positive promotion of public schools in Western Australia through mainstream media, internet, social networking sites, advertising and other networking methods.

A school ERG report should not be broadly published however they should be made readily available to the school staff, school community and to interested parties upon request.

School Funding, Resourcing and Support

Federal Review of Funding for Schooling – State Government Responsibilities

Preamble

The Federal Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski Review) has provided a comprehensive report on the restructuring of the complex and inequitable Federal funding model which it cites as basing school funding on an “outdated and opaque average cost measure”. It finds that there is currently a distinct lack of coordination in the way governments fund schooling, particularly ‘in relation to directing funding to schools based on student need.’

The quantifiable decline in Australian educational performance by our schools is alarming. At the foundation of this decline is the inequity that exists across the spectrum of Australian schools. The review provides a clear framework for the achievement of equality in educational opportunity for all students regardless of their location, family income, ethnicity, disability or any other disadvantage that impacts on their capacity to achieve their educational potential.

The Gonski Review provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enact serious reform in regard to how schools in Western Australia are funded. The recommendations made facilitate increased opportunities for all students and greater equity in education. The review finds that ‘the current funding arrangements are unnecessarily complex, lack coherence and transparency, and involve a duplication of funding efforts in some areas.’ It is now time for State and Federal Governments to work together to implement the finding of this important document and ensure a high quality education for the future of all students.

Position

WACSSO fully supports the recommendations in the Federal Review of Funding for Schooling Report and calls upon the State Government to fully and openly participate in the Council of Australian Governments’ process to enable the recommendations to be implemented.

WACSSO calls upon the State Government to publically commit to the implementation of the recommendations of the Federal Review of Funding for Schooling.

Information Communication Technology – Increased support funding for schools

Preamble

Significant advances in technology over the past decade have led to an increase in the use of ICT in public schools to aid teachers in ensuring their students receive a high quality education. The rapid development of mobile phone, computer and other digital technologies has led to several new initiatives in schools such as the introduction of electronic whiteboards, iPads and laptops for every student. If fully supported through appropriate funding and resourcing, this technology has the potential to have a dramatic and positive effect on student outcomes. In an evolving classroom environment that continues to move away from traditional teaching methods, the effective use of ICT to supplement a student's education helps to accommodate the varying learning styles of modern students. It has been well documented that the effective use of ICT in classrooms leads to an improvement of student outcomes.

Unfortunately, as the State Government continues to roll out new ICT initiatives in schools, it has not provided the funding and resources needed to ensure that this new technology can be fully utilised. Many public schools in Western Australia lack the training and ongoing professional development for teachers to use this technology effectively and the IT support staff to ensure that equipment is maintained and serviced properly. There are also issues with the currency of software on existing computers and the stability of bandwidth, especially in rural and remote areas. As a result, while schools may have advanced technology in place, they lack the support, knowledge and resources to utilize it effectively; this is detrimental to the quality of education our students receive.

We want to ensure all public school students have equitable access to digital technology that will optimise their educational outcomes. We believe that the State Government must provide funding to ensure there are modern information and digital technology systems in place that are supported through both the training of staff and the provision of school-based technical and maintenance support.

Position

WACSSO calls for increased funding in the following areas:

Systems and Infrastructure

1. An upgrade of SIS to a web based system.
2. An upgrade of bandwidth capabilities for ALL schools
3. Implementation of the current Standard operating environment (SOE) in ALL schools

Support in Schools

4. That permanent dedicated ICT support specialists be located at each school based on a formula of 1 FTE for every 200 computers at that school.
5. That primary schools with less than 200 computers share the FTE allocation with other schools in the surrounding area.
6. That a flying squad of ICT support specialists based in the regional education offices be established to service the needs of remote communities.
7. That position titles and levels for ICT support staff are standardised across the state and be employed under the Public Service Award.
8. That the FTE for these positions is funded centrally by the Department of Education via the staffing formula to that school.

Professional Development

9. That ongoing & appropriate PD is delivered to all staff (ICT support specialists/teaching/school support staff).

School Support Review

Preamble

The restructuring of the Education Department in 2010 saw the closure of District Education Offices and the introduction of Regional Offices which cover substantially larger areas and rely on a school networking system to facilitate local support.

WACSSO has received feedback that the removal of District Education Offices has resulted in less local support for school principals and staff. In comparison to District Offices which serviced much smaller regions, Regional Offices support larger catchment areas and therefore their resources are stretched over a greater number of schools. Many schools that once had a District Office relatively close must now travel great distances to receive support and training. In effect, the local tier of support that schools received has been completely disbanded and this has had widespread negative implications on schools, especially those in rural and remote areas.

Professional development, a main agenda of former District Offices, is now facilitated through the development of school networks. Unfortunately, the school network system has yet to be proven sufficient in ensuring that schools and staff receive the support and professional development they require. The number of PD days for staff has dropped with the loss of District Office staff who organised these events in the past. Although the school network system has been in operation since 2010, it has yet to prove it can provide the support to schools that District Offices once did.

The introduction of Independent Public Schools has been designed with the Director General as the direct line manager for all IPS Principals in the State. WACSSO is concerned that Principals are not being provided with support and that problems experienced at a school level may continue unaddressed until evidence of dysfunction appears through NAPLAN results or from parental complaints.

Position

WACSSO calls for:

- A review of the school networking initiative in regard to its effectiveness in supporting local schools.
- A review of the Independent Public Schools to determine the adequacy of support and the ability for the Department of Education to monitor school effectiveness beyond NAPLAN data.
- The re-instatement of some roles (ie. Curriculum Manager, Co-ordinator Regional Operations) related to school support and professional development in rural District Offices.

Independent Public Schools Review and expansion of the program

Preamble

In 2009 the State Government announced the introduction of Independent Public Schools with the first schools gaining IPS status in 2010. By the commencement of 2013 almost 50% of public schools operating as an IPS.

At the end of 2010 the Minister for Education announced an independent review of the performance of IPS by the Department of Education Services. This review has yet to be completed.

While WACSSO does not oppose the transition of schools to IPS status it is concerned that with the fourth intake of IPS, over 50% of Schools will be operating as IPS by 2013 without evidence that IPS improves school and student performance.

Further, issues are starting to surface in regard to difficulties surrounding teachers' placements and the difficulties of country teachers returning to a metropolitan school. The Department of Education has announced that all schools will soon have greater flexibility in the appointment of staff; this may assist in alleviating this growing problem; however it will increase the work load on school administrators.

In some instances, IPS is beginning to be perceived by some as an 'elite tier' of the government schooling system. This is due to the greater flexibility IPS schools have in appointing and securing quality teachers and the greater ability to use resources where they are needed most. The State Governments active promotion of IPS schools has also fueled the misconception that they offer a higher quality education than government schools operating in the normal system. WACSSO does not support any program that creates a two-tiered education system with Government schools and will lobby to ensure ALL Government schools have the same level of access to resources and a high caliber of teaching and administrative staff.

Position

WACSSO calls for:

- A halt to any further intake of schools into the IPS program until an independent review has been undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the program and clear benefits to student outcomes.
- Parents of students in IPS schools participating in the review be asked about any increase in parental engagement under this program. (This was a suggestion from SC3)

The State Government to increase school funding to schools to ensure public schools, both IPS and non-IPS, can provide a high quality education to WA students.

School Council/Board Training – Reintroduction of WACSSO funding

Preamble

WACSSO currently provides comprehensive training and resource material for our affiliated Parents and Citizens Associations on governance, roles and responsibilities, all work place related issues regarding the operation of canteens and uniform shops, insurance obligations and community capacity building strategies.

Until 2010 WACSSO also provided similar training for School Councils, however the \$15 000 funding provision for this service was removed by the Department of Education who then took on the responsibility of providing this service.

With the introduction of Independent Public Schools (IPS) some initial training has been provided to these School Councils (now called Boards) however the bulk of this training is targeted at school Administrators not community members.

It is evident that since WACSSO lost funding to provide training to School Councils very little has been provided by the Department to School Councils (i.e. non IPS schools) and only a small proportion of IPS training has been targeted at the parent and community members of School Boards.

Training for School Council/Board members, as with P&Cs, needs to be consistent and ongoing as members have a relatively high rotation rate and skills and knowledge are lost when members leave.

Increased responsibilities with IPS Boards and the Government's commitment to greater parental engagement requires that parent representatives are skilled and supported to undertake their role on School Boards and Councils effectively.

Position

WACSSO already provides comprehensive training and resource material to school P&Cs and can provide high quality, cost effective training to our affiliate School Council/Boards.

WACSSO calls for the re-introduction of funding to enable the organisation to adequately train school council/board members in their roles and responsibilities on an ongoing, cost effective basis.

Year 7 relocation to Secondary School

Preamble

The State Government has announced that from 2015 Year 7 will be relocated to secondary school. WACSSO Policy section G.9.2 states that we 'do 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 Government's decision, our focus has shifted to ensuring that the relocation is well planned, well resourced and undertaken for sound educational reasons.

WACSSO has expressed its concerns about the previous lack of consultation in regard to this decision. As the key stakeholder in representing the views of parents of children in the public education system, we are keen to participate in the transition process to provide input in regard to parental concerns and opinions and to help facilitate an open and constructive dialogue between the Department of Education and parents.

WACSSO recognizes that there will be significant cost associated with ensuring a smooth transition for Year 7s to high school in 2015 and calls upon the Government to ensure that the Education and Capital Works Budgets over the next 3 years realistically reflect these costs.

Position

WACSSO calls upon the State Government to implement a staged transition of Year 7s to high schools. In particular it calls for a review of the impacts to rural and remote communities and families with the transition of Year 7's to high school with a view to delay the transition to these areas to at least 2018.

WACSSO calls upon the State Government to adequately budget and fund:

- the construction of new buildings where necessary on high school sites;
- improvements to district high schools to enable them to cater for Year 7's;
- An assessment of the adequacy of current public school boarding facilities and begin construction of additional boarding facilities for metropolitan and regional public high schools, where necessary, to be ready for February 2015;
- Comprehensive teacher training for high school teachers charged with implementing a Year 7 curriculum;
- The provision of appropriate transition to high school programs; and,
- Financial support for families of country students who will be forced to commence boarding school in Year 7 rather than Year 8.

WACSSO calls for the facilitation of formal consultation and communication between the Department of Education and WACSSO in order to ensure that the concerns and issues raised by parents are addressed during the relocation.

Save Our School Dental Clinics

Preamble

School based dental clinics play an important role in student health and allow all Western Australian students to access free dental services.

Due to inadequate funding our School Dental Clinics are now in crisis. Poor conditions and lack of administrative capabilities have resulted in extended waiting periods for appointments; in some clinics these have blown out to over 24 months. Many dental clinics are operating without basic equipment such as computers, fax machines and answering machines.

Dental Clinic Assistants (DCAs) are the lowest paid qualified staff in the Public Service; this has resulted in a significant loss of staff and an inability to attract new employees. In some cases clinics are no longer able to operate due to lack of staff.

The average age of current DCA'S is 47, with many staff members retiring in the near future; an issue that will put further stress on already understaffed clinics.

The State Government continues to undervalue the vital role that School Dental Clinics and their staff play in the continued health our students. If conditions remain the same, waiting periods will continue to deteriorate and, as there is little to attract new staff, more clinics may be forced to close.

Position

WACSSO calls upon the Government to ensure:

- Funding for Dental Clinics is increased to ensure they have basic administration equipment in place such as computers, software, printers and fax machines;
- Pay rates for Dental Clinic Assistants be increased to adequately reflect the level of qualifications they hold; and
- Pay and conditions for Dental Clinic staff, including dentists, dental therapists, dental clinic assistants and dental technicians be increased to assist in the attraction and retention of workers.

School Based Community Health Nurses

School based Community Health Nurses play a major role in health promotion, prevention and early intervention. They address current health issues arising in the school community while developing and building on existing initiatives in schools to provide appropriate preventative health care. They also address the sensitive and complex nature of health issues for students and their families. Community Health Nurses provide a pivotal service to school communities, particularly with increasing community concern over lifestyle diseases and mental health issues. It is considered that a lack, or reduction, of these services at any school will potentially have an adverse affect on the overall health and well being of students.

Recent information shows that for children between 4 and 15 years:

- 41% have long-term health problems
- 12% are asthmatic
- 7%-14% have mental health problems
- 0.2% are insulin dependent diabetics
- 25% are overweight or obese
- In a 4 week period 25% will experience an injury
- Rate of first time anaphylactic reaction has trebled in 5 years

WACSSO believes these figures indicate a convincing need for a strong presence of Community Health Nurses in WA public schools.

Without a Community Health Nurse present in school communities, the responsibility for student health falls to teachers, whose primary role is education. Most teachers do not have the training or skills needed to address the complex health care needs of children and adolescents. They cannot and should not be expected to take on the responsibility of a health care professional.

The pool of Community Health Nurses allocated to schools in Western Australia has not been increased in a number of years, despite the well documented increasing health care needs of school aged children.

Based on the information above, WACSSO requests that adequate funds are allocated to facilitate the employment of a Community Health Nurse on a full time basis in School Health Services in all existing public schools in Western Australia.

Fully Funded Student Welfare Services

Preamble

In line with WACSSO Policy B.1 'Funding of Education,' WACSSO believes "A principal role of Government is to fully fund public education."

Many schools, particularly those with a high population of students who have a language background other than English, newly arrived migrants who have low numeracy and literacy levels and suffering from mental health issues associated with having lived in countries of social and civil unrest, schools with a high population of indigenous students and school in low socio-economic areas are struggling to support these students in the provision of their welfare needs which must be addressed if they are to achieve academic success. The lack of welfare and health services within schools places high levels of stress on teachers and other students.

Position

WACSSO calls for:

- An increase in school budgets to assist schools provide additional welfare services, such as additional school psychologist time, school nurse services, student services officers and welfare offices.

Student Road Safety

Provision of School Crossing Guards

Preamble

There are approximately 1100 schools in WA, yet only about 400 Government funded school crossing guards. Many schools apply for a crossing guard and are refused due to the narrow and flawed methodology used to determine the ratio of cars to pedestrian over a given time period. This poorly devised method of determining need does not take into account road conditions, vehicle types (i.e. heavy haulage), speed limit of the road, and ages of pedestrians making the crossing or number of unsupervised crossings by children. The safety of West Australia's school children is being put at risk due to this outdated system.

There are two types of school crossings in WA, Type A and Type B, which are approved and overseen by the Children's Crossing and Road Safety Committee (CCRSC), of which WACSSO is a member. At present, to qualify for a Type "A" crossing the site must fulfill two conditions. For primary schools, there must be at least 20 students and 200 vehicles using that road in the hour immediately before and after school commences and finishes. For secondary schools, the vehicle prerequisite rises to 700. For a Type "B" crossing the number of students and vehicles for primary schools is halved to 10 students and 100 vehicles. For secondary schools, the vehicle prerequisite is 350.

Type A Crossings are staffed by Government funded crossing guards, while in the case of Type B crossings it is left up to the school community to fund a guard. It is beyond the capacity of most Government schools to fund this type of service. Therefore, while a school may be approved of a Type B crossing, in which only the infrastructure is funded by the State Government, the risks remain as they are unable to employ a guard. The end result is a situation where students are crossing potentially dangerous roads without a trained guard onsite.

Responsibility for student road safety requires the cooperation of various Government Departments including the Department of Education, Police, Main Roads and Local Governments.

Position

The safety of West Australian school children is paramount. Any school that requests a crossing guard should be provided with one immediately for an initial 6 month period while further assessments are carried out.

The current formula to determine the need for a Type A crossing must be amended to take into account other risk factors such as road conditions, speed limits, types of vehicles using the road, pedestrian age and number of unsupervised crossings. In this way a more accurate determination of risk will be achieved.

The State Government investigates the provision of 'walk lights' at all schools without traffic guards.

40km speed zone around schools all day

Preamble

The safety of children travelling to and from school is paramount.

The introduction of the 40km speed zone around schools from 7:30 – 9:00am and 2:30 – 4:00pm was welcomed by WACSSO. However, with most school areas only signposted with standard signs (i.e., not flashing 40km zone lights) many motorists do not slow down when the time comes for the 40km speed restrict to come into place.

The introduction of IPS schools has created the flexibility for schools to significantly alter their opening and closing times and to open or close outside of the Department of Education school calendar. Non-government schools also determine their own opening and closing times and dates. Some schools do not commence classes until 9:05am and students are still making their way to school when the 40km speed restriction has expired. Similarly with the transition of Year 7s to high school in 2015 some high schools may run two timetables with student cohorts beginning and ending at different times which may fall well outside the current 40km time allocations. Students also make their way to school outside these times due to out-of-hours commitments in relation to specialist classes or school sports training commitments.

Position

WACSSO calls for the introduction of 40km speed restriction at all schools from 7:00am to 5:00pm on all school days.

Community Engagement

Parental Engagement

Preamble

It is well known that parental engagement in education has a dramatic effect on student outcome. The recent Federal Review of Funding for Schools (Gonkski Review) states that, "Parental engagement (including carers and legal guardians) has a large and positive impact on children's learning." This sentiment is also reflected in the Melbourne Declaration and the National Education Agreement.

Parents can play a valuable role in the operation of the school through P&C activities, representation on the School Council/Board and through informal engagement in school activities/events.

Providing a wide variety of opportunities for parents to engage with the school will strengthen the partnership between teachers and parents and ultimately increase student outcomes. The Gonkski Review comments that,

"Parents and teachers should work in partnership to set high expectations and support children in their learning and development. Parents should also be supported by the school to contribute to the school's culture and operation. This works best when the parental engagement strategy is part of a whole-of-school approach, and teachers are offered professional learning on how to effectively engage with parents."

Some impediments to parental engagement in schools are lack of time; lack of confidence in approaching teachers, administrators, P&C organisations etc; a lack of real or perceived opportunity to be involved; lack of knowledge about activities, and so on. Despite this, parental engagement is vital to the success of all students and WACSSO is committed to assisting parents to actively engage in their child's schooling. WACSSO recognizes that schools also need to be supported in their engagement with parents and provided with adequate training and resources to ensure the engagement is both positive and useful.

Position:

WACSSO calls for:

- An increase in the depth and breadth of training provided to pre-service teachers to increasing their skills in relation to promoting positive interactions with parents.

Teacher Registration Board – Creation of a Stakeholder Advisory Group

Preamble

The replacement of the WA College of Teaching (WACoT) with a Teacher Registration Board has eliminated the input of key stakeholders, such as WACSSO. WACSSO held a position on the WACoT Board since its inception and provided important advice to WACoT's operations and decisions, and ensured our affiliated P&Cs were kept informed of WACoT's activities.

The former Minister for Education denied WACSSO and other like stakeholders, a position on the new Teacher Registration Board (TRB). Parents understand the importance of quality teachers and in denying WACSSO a voice on this board the previous Minister effectively ignored the input of parents.

Position

WACSSO calls for:

- The creation of a Stakeholder Advisory Group underneath the main board to be kept informed of the TRB activities and decisions.

Financial Assistance

Re-introduction of Secondary School Student Subsidies

Preamble

In 2011 the State Government removed the "It Pays to Learn" Allowance which assisted parents who qualified for the payment to cover the costs of their child's secondary educational expenses. At the same time the Government also removed the "Secondary School Student Subsidy" which assisted schools in the provision of additional student services.

The removal of the Secondary School Student Subsidy payment significantly reduced High School operational budgets. With diminished resources many high schools' had cut or reduce non-curricular programs or services such as student welfare services. The loss of the "It Pays to Learn" Allowance has increased the financial burden on families already struggling to meet the costs of educating their children.

The axing of these payments, combined with an overall reduction in the payment of voluntary contributions and charges due to a higher cost of living, has resulted in many school budgets being significantly cut.

Position

WACSSO calls for:

- A re-introduction of an allowance for parents of secondary school children in Years 11 and 12 to assist them meet the costs of educating their children.