WACSSO Submission to the

INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

WACSSO

Acknowledgements

This submission has been prepared with the help of West Australian public school parents, Parents & Citizens Associations and school communities. Guided by the review's Terms of Reference and Discussion Paper, our affiliates provided information on their experiences, issues faced, as well as initiatives and recommendations for improving regional, rural and remote education.

WACSSO would like to recognise and thank our affiliates for the time and effort taken to contribute to this important review.

WACSSO

Document Summary

This Document Summary functions as both a table of contents and a register of the recommendations made throughout WACSSO's submission.

Who is WACSSO

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia. WACSSO provides services and representation at State and National level to 660 Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs), four school boards and two school councils in Western Australia. WACSSO is largely a volunteer organisation made up of a President and State Councillors (representatives) from geographically-based electorates and, as such, the organisation has a wide representative reach across the state.

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Abbreviations

AIEO	Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
BYOD	Bring Your Own Device
EA	Educational Assistant
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GROH	Government Regional Officer Housing
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPS	Independent Public School
ISP	Internet Service Provider
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OM	Otitis Media
P&C	Parents & Citizens Association
PD	Professional Development
PEAC	Primary Extension and Challenge
POD	Personally Owned Device
SIDE	School of Isolated and Distance Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TLG	Teach Learn Grow

VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA	Western Australia
WACE	Western Australian Certificate of Education
WACSSO	West Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO)

Introduction

Statistically, we know that the further away from the metropolitan area a student attends school the poorer their results become. It is completely unacceptable that educational disadvantage exists in Australia. Students in more remote areas are consistently outperformed by their metropolitan peers, simply because of their post-code growing up. Our lived reality is that on average, students in provincial areas of Australia, such as Kalgoorlie and Northam in Western Australia, are 1-and-a-quarter-years of schooling behind metropolitan students, whilst remote students are a whole 2-and-a-half years behind.[i] It's time we addressed this educational disadvantage. We need to ensure equitable access to education for all students - irrespective of their postcode.

In making this submission we feel compelled to state that we have found the lack of definitional clarity around regional, rural and remote to be problematic. By leaving the lines of the three so blurred, we are at risk of making blanket recommendations that may work fantastically in one context, but fail in another. We are hopeful that the breadth of information that will be received and considered will assist in improving this issue of clarity (or lack of) in the future.

Regional, rural and remote contexts are distinctive and vary from state to state. The contexts surrounding regional centres, rural communities and the remote are very different - especially when contrasting Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia with the remaining states and territory. For instance, a large regional high school in Bunbury, Western Australia has a lot more in common with a metropolitan school than the same Bunbury high school would have in common with a remote, Aboriginal community school based in the Kimberley. Further, a remote school in the Northern Territory may have very little in common with a remote school in New South Wales. It is important we differentiate between the three and what each means in the context of each state to devise targeted strategies for improvement.

This submission deals with the terms of reference and some additional points within the scope of the organisation's representation of West Australian parents of public school students. A summary document, listing all recommendations made within, has also been provided.

Whilst guided by the discussion paper's focus on innovative and fresh approaches that are improving, or could improve, student achievements and transition to further study, training and employment, WACSSO's submission will provide a comprehensive picture of public education and the concerns felt, observations made and recommendations by parents and citizens across Western Australia's diverse, far reaching state.

Please note that the following recommendations are a collaboration between WACSSO and our affiliates. They should be considered as a response to the many unique contexts in which Western Australia's rural, regional or remote schools are situated, rather than that of rural, regional or remote schools generally.

1. Curriculum and Assessment

The Western Australian Department of Education states that, "public schools offer a full curriculum and a range of programs that are designed to excite, stimulate and inspire children to learn." Our affiliate feedback and research indicated that, if delivered well, the Australian Curriculum would meet the learning needs and interest of regional, rural and remote students. For regional, rural and remote schools to succeed in the equitable delivery of a high quality national curriculum, they must be adequately resourced and effectively supported.

1.1 Regional, Rural and Remote schools require appropriate teacher numbers to address the full curriculum in a robust and stimulating manner

While all schools require appropriate teacher numbers, it would be reasonable to expect that due to the additional complexities of teaching in rural and remote schools a slightly higher teacher student ratio should be in place. In addition to the number of teachers, or full time equivalent (FTE/hours) of teaching staff allocation, we consider it essential to have a suitable mix of experienced and graduate teachers from a diverse range of learning areas.

Teachers in regional, rural and remote schools are often overworked, with multiple learning areas assigned to them – sometimes outside of their training, area of speciality or experience. Whilst this is an issue that also afflicts many metropolitan teachers, it is compounded by a variety of additional circumstances that are specific to regional, rural and remote areas. For instance, lack of and distance from professional development; lack of support staff as a result of low student numbers and subsequent low budget allocations; inability to access quality virtual support due to poor ICT; and more. As such, regional, rural and remote teachers are placed under a considerable amount of pressure to

not only teach the curriculum, but to teach it well. This has particular relevance in District High Schools, which typically have smaller student numbers in the high school meaning that the staffing FTE is below that which is required to assign a dedicated teacher to each curriculum subject. Whilst this may be sustainable when teaching two subjects, it becomes a very real issue when teachers are required to facilitate good learning outcomes across multiple subjects. The issue is further compounded when, as often is the case in the regional, rural and remote schools, teachers are graduates.

An affiliated District High School in Western Australia's south-east reported a case where a drop in student numbers resulted in the teaching allocation in the school's budget being downwardly adjusted – a common occurrence in metropolitan and country schools alike. The Physical Education teacher at this school, whose sole subject when they accepted the position was Physical Education and Health, both in the Primary and High School, had their role and workload added to. They now teach high school Mathematics, Physical Education for Years 5-12, high school Health Education, High School Kitchen Skills (the school also lost the ability to run the VET Certificate in Hospitality), Careers and is also responsible for running the Student Leadership Program. This teacher works extremely hard to fulfil all these areas well. However, the workload is significant. This is a younger teacher who does not have family in this remote area, and they are seemingly willing to give a considerable amount of after school hours to accommodate the increased workload. It is clear that this individual is being over worked, despite not having adequate training. This is not best practice, nor does it cater for teacher wellbeing. This is not an isolated incident and one that we hear all too often. We cannot expect our students to achieve the best outcomes possible when our teachers are being overworked.

Due to staffing inefficiencies and difficulty attracting teachers in small schools, and "consequently a greater need to provide classes over a wide range of subject areas,"[ii] many of our regional, rural and remote teachers are forced to teach out-of-field. We know that the "extent of out-of-field teaching increases with distance from metropolitan locations."[iii] Out-of-field teaching has a significant impact on the delivery of curriculum in already challenging circumstances.

1.2 Develop a set of resources designed to assist teachers to creatively use the local environment, industry and community when delivering the curriculum.

It is often difficult for schools to provide well-resourced classrooms, libraries and specialist facilities, mostly due to funding deficiencies. Beyond the funding hurdles, there is the issue of geographic distance. Unlike teachers based in the metropolitan area, country teachers often struggle to have tangible resources at their fingertips. Budgets are soon absorbed by

freight costs when ordering online or teachers are required to travel hundreds of kilometres to purchase resources. Teachers located in smaller towns, where the ability to purchase or source those extras for classroom learning are not always readily available, should be guided by a set of resources to utilise local environments, industry and community members to deliver the curriculum in a manner that inspires learning - particularly in STEM fields.

It is important to buttress classroom learning with these innovative collaborations between school, local environments, local industry and community. However, it's also important to recognise that in regional, rural and remote areas, lessons are often already informed by local industry. An affiliate of WACSSO has pointed out that school administration and teachers need to ensure topics that are not local industry related (i.e. agriculture, mining, fishing etc.) are also covered, as not all students want to go into local industry career pathways. For example, not all young people growing up in Western Australia's Central Wheatbelt desire to be farmers. Schools should encourage students to consider looking beyond their local areas for career inspiration, whilst concurrently fostering strong connections to place and pride in the local area.

1.3 Ensure teaching staff have the support of adequately trained Educational Assistants, Aboriginal Islander Education Officers and, where required, Interpreters

Our affiliates are calling for more, and adequately trained, education support staff as a great starting point to improve the public education system. AITSL Standard 1 *Know Students and How they Learn*[iv] outlines the requirements of teachers to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their students' backgrounds when educating them. It is essential that Education Assistants (EAs) and Aboriginal and Islander Officers (AIEOs) have similar requirements to teachers, as defined in the AITSL Standards, and training enabling them to support students' learning.

It has been suggested by our affiliates that class sizes and their structures, including multi-age classrooms, impede student achievement in country areas. Wherever a student sits on the spectrum of need, low student numbers and a variety of age groups in the one classroom, often mean they are not being adequately catered for. The inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms, particularly those with behavioural issues, can be challenging. This is particularly true in situations where teachers are not adequately equipped to manage the array of needs they are presented with in their school. All students should be supported in their learning to achieve the best outcomes possible, just as all teaching staff should be supported to deliver quality education to all students in their

care. This is not a low cost option, but it is a sure way to improve the outcomes of students.

1.4 Create school networks to develop best practice for assessment and reporting of the Australian Curriculum

Feedback from our affiliates suggests that current assessment processes vary greatly from school to school and teacher to teacher, especially in country areas where there is a greater degree of isolation than in metropolitan settings. By developing school networks that are guided by a set of clear resources, there will be greater consistency across assessment and reporting practices, not only across regional, rural and remote areas, but across the nation. School network activities can also be used to develop best practice guidelines. A system of school networks will provide space for mentoring, peer reflection and pooling of resources.

1.5 To teach the curriculum in accordance with its increasingly digital focus and to prepare students for transitioning beyond school, it is imperative government agencies improve the delivery and provision of ICT in our nation's schools.

ICT is lacking in many areas. This should not be news to anyone. Access and quality of ICT in country areas is still a very real and continuing issue.

A teacher may be considered *Highly Accomplished* against AITSL Standard 2.6 Information and Communication Technology (ICT): *Model high-level teaching knowledge and skills and work with colleagues to use current ICT to improve their teaching practice and make content relevant and meaningful.*[v] However, if the infrastructure and network of a school is insufficient then the standard of teaching is directly impacted, to the detriment of the students, as the teacher does not have the necessary equipment to deliver a full and effective ICT program.

It is not just the teaching of ICT related subjects that are impacted by the lack of infrastructure and network access. All areas of the curriculum benefit from teachers and students being able to access a wide range of internet based resources and experiences.

1.6 The School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) must continue to be supported by reliable ICT, at SIDE and for participating students, in order to successfully deliver the Australian Curriculum to regional, rural and remote students. This should include research into what is best practice for distance learning and what resources are needed.

In many regional, rural and remote schools in Western Australia, the curriculum is delivered from the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). It is imperative for this type of distance education that ICT capability, computer hardware and network access is reliable.

Over the last decade, there has been a huge growth in online and external delivery of education programs. There is an ever increasing library of resources, including high quality instructional videos, virtual reality experiences and simulations that teachers can use to support students through distance education. Time and resources need to be allocated to ensure distance education programs are high quality and utilise best practices to ensure students are well connected to their peers, their teachers, and high quality learning experiences.

1.7 Expand the SIDE program to enable greater subject choice for secondary school students

Due to class size requirements, there is a distinct lack of subject selection for many students outside of the metropolitan area. This is particularly evident in senior school at Year 11 and 12 levels, in both Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways. Even more specifically, there is a distinct lack of quality STEM education. Metropolitan based students have the option to enrol in neighbouring schools if the courses offered better suit their interests and needs; regional, rural and remote students don't have that opportunity.

Another option for expanding educational choice and opportunity is boarding school, which has its own flow-on effects. Sending your child to board is an extremely hard decision, which involves a variety of decision making factors. Most families are unable to send their children to boarding school for economic reasons. However, there are also emotional and personal reasons behind the decision. Students in country areas should not be at a disadvantage because certain courses cannot be offered through lack of funding or qualified instructors.

Residential colleges in country Australia (i.e. Geraldton Residential College and Merredin Residential College in Western Australia) offer another solution for regional, rural and remote secondary students who do not have a public school within reasonable distance.

By filling these colleges, SIDE can be more effectively delivered to those schools with higher student numbers wanting to do specialty subjects.

Subjects like English Literature, Physics and Mathematics Specialist are only offered at schools where there are sufficient students wanting to undertake those courses of study. These subjects may not be offered because the school cannot afford to staff subjects with a small number of students, which may result in very capable students being denied the opportunity to develop to the best of their ability, or undertake a prerequisite subject for further education.

In Western Australia the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) is an option. However, delivery is often not supported by reliable ICT and most students struggle without the face-to-face contact. Providing extra funding for qualified teachers will allow smaller class sizes, cancel out some of the pervasive out-of-field teaching practice and increase subject options. A more cost effective method would be to invest in the SIDE program and provide a smooth, high quality service for students requiring greater subject choice. SIDE is still cost prohibitive in many situations and also requires a supervising teacher at the student's own school who, ideally, has some subject knowledge. The cost of the SIDE program should never be passed on to the student.

1.8 Provide work placements in state and local government agencies for senior school students undertaking Vocational Education and Training (VET) studies, by developing a partnership program with the state's Department of Education.

To obtain a Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) a student must complete either four Year 12 ATAR Courses or a Certificate II (or higher) Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification. VET enables students to acquire workplace skills through nationally recognised training described within an industry-developed training package or an accredited course. Students studying a VET pathway have work placement requirements where they engage in practical on the job experience, developing industry skills to equip them for new, emerging economies.

WACSSO has been receiving an increased number of reports from teachers, students and parents about the difficulty of securing work placements for VET students - particularly in regional, rural and, even more so, remote areas. Where limited certificate options are offered by a local school it creates increased competition for access to work placements.

State and local government agencies deliver a wide range of services and are located throughout the state. We see an opportunity for the Government to make an investment in education by committing to having agencies host work placements for VET students. Not

only will this dramatically increase the number of work placements available it will relieve the pressure on other businesses struggling to cater for the need. Where established agreements are in place it can reduce the administrative burden and time consuming process of staff trying, often unsuccessfully, to secure future placements. It would also give better certainty to schools when determining what certificates are able to be offered for study.

1.9 Research what resources and supports are needed for teachers in multi-age classrooms in order to teach the Australian Curriculum in completion to all students. Try to limit this practice as much as possible.

As it stands, the Australian Curriculum is very comprehensive, which places a great deal of pressure on teachers and leaders to ensure that it is being covered in completion. Feedback from our affiliates suggests that in small schools with multi-age classrooms, the Australian Curriculum is seemingly impossible to teach in its purest form. multi-age classrooms, unless they have a very experienced teacher and additional support (in terms of senior teachers, EAs and resources) are complex learning environments and present challenges for students and teachers alike.

It is incredibly difficult for one teacher and one EA to manage just the behavioural aspects of the classroom (as many of the young kindy, pre-primary and lower primary students are still learning social behaviours, hygiene etc.). For the older students, concentration is thwarted by noise levels – even if managed properly you still have distractions of younger students and the layout of the class so that you can see other students playing and so on. Teachers are struggling to integrate numerous topics into single lessons in order to accommodate the different age groups in the classroom, rather than being able to teach them adequately in isolation. Given that class structures in regional, rural and remote schools tend to merge numerous year groups, students are not learning the whole curriculum to its full potential. There have also been reports of students repeating year level learning as it is deemed easier to teach in a multi-age class structure.

1.10 The priority focus must be on equity and delivery of programs before any assessment can be considered useful or able to be used for comparative purposes.

Current assessment processes do not help to improve the achievements of regional, rural and remote students, because small Level 3 schools rarely have enough students within a testing cohort to be visible on the system wide database that compares or ranks schools.

1.11 Level 3 Principals, at the very least, should not have a teaching load, and they should have curriculum leadership professional learning upon their first appointment

Small schools in regional, rural and remote areas experience difficulty sharing the workload that is required of all schools. There are simply not enough people to delegate curriculum leadership roles to. This means that the Principal, who often has a teaching load themselves, becomes responsible for ensuring that the curriculum and its requirement for informed and effective planning, teaching and assessment practices are thoroughly implemented. This can be incredibly difficult to fit in, and places small schools at a disadvantage to larger schools that have deputy Principals or curriculum leaders available to work with staff, write plans and policies, and ensure that processes are effective and consistent across the school. There is just not enough time for the Principal of a small school to do all of this alone, especially if they have a teaching load, even more so if they have little experience in leading curriculum.

1.12 Shared mental health support services between neighbouring schools and communities and professional development for school staff to care for students' mental health

A recurring theme from our affiliates' feedback is an increasing focus of mental health and the current system's deficiencies. A focus on student wellbeing will improve outcomes. Until schools are able to successfully build emotional intelligence, encourage resilience and provide mental health support, learning will be hampered. At first glance, this looks like a nationwide consideration. However, the isolation of a number of schools means that money allocated for chaplaincy or counselling under Western Australia's one line budget is ineffective. An example of this is in rural Western Australia, an affiliated school has an allocated budget for a three day per week chaplain, which is an easier position for them to fill than that of counsellor, and yet they cannot get a chaplain for the time due to geographical reasons.

Affiliates have highlighted a need for a focus on developing the counselling skills of all school staff especially assistance in identifying issues in mental health, training in mental health and identifying students at risk.

1.13 Where professional learning and development occurs, we need to ensure time and resources are provided to implement the learning within the school community

Schools can be supported by provision of quality PD, including funding for relief to attend and/or experts coming to provide PD. The model of one person attending PD and then imparting their knowledge does not empower the whole school nor is it as effective as if

everyone was able to attend. Because relief teaching is a luxury many smaller schools are not afforded, sending all staff members to PD or having a professional on site is not an option. A more effective method would be to ensure time and resources are provided for those who do attend to implement the learning and to share this information with peers.

1.14 Explore the possibility of increasing online collaborations with other schools

There are examples of online collaborations between schools, which are fantastic provided that there is adequate ICT networking and infrastructure. One such example of a well received, current program that utilises global educational networks, whilst not necessarily employed in a regional, rural or remote context, is the design-challenge project: Learning Studios. As part of HP and Microsoft's Reinvent the Classroom initiative, Digital Promise Global is directing a global network of Learning Studios designed for student-centred, experiential learning.

> "The Learning Studios network inspires instructional innovation and next-generation learning experiences. Learning Studios support advanced blended learning, international collaboration, and the maker movement in education."[vi]

These sorts of programs in our country schools would provide excellent educational, social and inspirational outcomes for students.

1.15 Foster mentorship programs between Year 11 and 12 students and past students as a form of curriculum support

One of our affiliated District High Schools in Western Australia's south-east has implemented an unofficial mentorship program. Students who achieved success in the 2016 ATAR results have been connected with students currently undertaking the ATAR pathway. These recently graduated students who did well were asked to support current students by providing advice on everything ATAR and transitioning beyond school, even tutoring. This unofficial and free program can be applied to also support VET students.

This practice is already employed in schools across the country. If a range of relevant resources were developed to guide this sort of mentorship, it would be a no cost, effective way to support secondary school students in their learning.

1.16 Use programs such as Teach Learn Grow to inspire the creation and expansion of curriculum related programs offered in regional, rural and remote schools

Teach Learn Grow (TLG) is a program that has received positive feedback from parents. The program provides free one-on-one tuition and mentoring to rural and Indigenous Western Australian students, with the aim of empowering students to realise their full potential.

There are costs involved to ensure the program is sustainable, however, these are not met by families. Teach Learn Grow's Rural Program sends volunteers out to rural WA communities to conduct one-on-one Australian Curriculum mathematics tutoring during a week-long visit to a school. Teach Learn Grow's eMentor program provides online interactive mentoring to upper-primary students in rural WA in preparation for their transition to high school, and supplements the Rural Program to ensure a sustainable impact. This initiative should inspire the creation and expansion of programs offered in regional, rural and remote schools.[vii]

2. Teachers and teaching

The recruitment and retention of quality staff is one of the biggest challenges facing the success of regional, rural and remote schools. This impacts a school's ability to deliver the Australian Curriculum.

Many affiliates identified that the question of how to support a high quality teaching workforce for regional, rural and remote school communities is not answered purely by funding.

There are very few initiatives attracting top teachers to regional, rural and remote schools. The pay allowance is negligible and now the costs of teacher housing in Western Australia has risen to the point where it is as expensive as the regular rental market. In some cases, there is no teacher housing available at all, or the quality of housing available is substandard. As it currently stands, it is predominantly graduates (the least experienced teachers within the system) who are employed in regional, rural and remote schools, which are typically complex. Many of these schools have high rates of social issues, multi-age classrooms, transiency and attendance issues. Our affiliates report that many of these schools have inexperienced principals who don't have the capacity or time to effectively support their professional development.

Another consideration when discussing the attraction of quality staff to regional, rural and remote schools in Western Australia is that there have been a number of reported incidents involving aggressive behaviour, assault and vandalism (e.g. fights at school, riots, etc.). Negative reports in the media, which sensationalise incidents, do not assist with attracting quality staff to the area.

While there are financial initiatives in place to attract 'top teachers' to regional, rural and remote schools, it appears that this isn't specific to attracting 'top teachers' and more often than not attracts those genuinely interested in working in these areas. It would be interesting to learn whether teachers who take up regional, rural and remote positions are

doing so because of their interest in teaching in these areas or because they can earn more money, do a short stint and then get a better job in a metropolitan school.

There is a myriad of professional development available to school staff across Australia. School staff in regional, rural and remote Australia require professional development in cross-cultural training, conflict management, leadership and management of multi-age classrooms. Pre-service teacher training should include curriculum, community and family engagement, and time management. Affiliates have highlighted a need for a focus on developing the counselling skills of all school staff especially assistance in identifying issues in mental health, training in mental health and identifying students at risk.

2.1 Housing and allowances, particularly in rural and remote areas, should be subsidised to incentivise teachers to live and work within these areas that are hard to staff. There are even arguments that this housing provision should be free.

In Western Australia, Government Regional Officer Housing (GROH) for Department of Education employees is allocated to employees who fulfil the eligibility criteria, providing there is suitable accommodation available. Moving to the country can be challenging and the satisfaction school staff have with their home will affect how effectively they are recruited and how long they are retained. The current standard and cost of GROH housing seems to be hindering this process. GROH accommodation is costly and often greater than private rentals. GROH housing rental costs have been increasing exponentially over the last two years. Maintenance does not get attended to in a timely manner, houses are old and rundown, which does not reflect the set rent, even bottled gas is expensive and there are no subsidies for this. For some teachers considering the move, there is effectively no subsidy and no incentive to teach in the country where rents are high.

2.2 Housing should be available for Educational Assistants at a subsidised rate with higher incentives.

In Western Australia, Education Assistants (EAs) are not eligible for Department of Education housing and therefore regional, rural and remote schools rarely have experienced and well trained EAs - often relying on local people to perform the task. Having housing available at a subsidised rate with higher incentives would help encourage trained EAs to regional, rural and remote areas to support teaching staff.

2.3 Graduating teachers placed in rural and remote locations require professional support networks to assist them to successfully adjust to their new career and new environments. Networks should be in place before graduates are placed in rural and remote communities.

Our affiliates are calling out for regional, rural and remote schools to only employ top teachers, as PD is not readily available. A suggested a solution is that graduating teachers should hold metropolitan positions before undertaking work in regional, rural and remote schools, where PD is readily available. However, WACSSO sees this as a problematic solution. Graduates bring a sense of freshness and energy to the school community. They do require support, peer mentoring, encouragement, professional development and enthusiasm to help them adjust to their new career. Stopping graduates from teaching in regional, rural and remote areas potentially robs country schools of excellent teachers.

2.4 An advertising campaign designed to attract teachers to hard-to-staff areas

Another way to attract 'top teachers,' is through advertising. The WA Department of Education hosts a rural and remote teaching expo, which allows university students, recent graduates and current teachers to explore the many personal and professional benefits of a career in a rural or remote school and hear from inspiring teachers and school leaders working in these schools.[viii] Capture the expo experience on film, edit it into a catchy video featuring individuals or a group of teachers who live in the country. This video should feature: why they like it, where they are and what makes it great. Video format is a good opportunity to address some frequently asked questions.

2.5 All school staff should be continually working towards fostering a positive school culture.

We know that money isn't the only solution; job satisfaction has been proven to be a key factor in retention of staff. Ultimately, by fostering positive school cultures, you will improve retention of 'top teachers' in regional, rural and remote schools. The education system must recognise the success of teachers. Whilst positive affirmations do not fix the problem in its entirety, they are incredibly sustaining and an encouraging school culture is at the heart and soul of successful learning.

2.6 Effective school leadership has a positive relationship with the retention of school staff.

Retention of teachers in schools often relies upon the leadership in place. When a school has great leadership and staff, parents have found the standard of education to be quite high as a result. It is sometimes said, teachers often don't leave schools, they leave

Principals. An experienced and effective leader within a school builds a culture of community and partnership. Retaining teachers will be helped by attracting quality leaders.

To retain excellent staff, the working environment should be professional with good leadership. There is lots of professional development in this space, currently. However, this can also add further burden to school administrators' existing workloads as they have to travel, find relief and so on. Following this, schools require committed Department of Education assistance if the staff are having conflicts with the leadership team. Part of this bundle should include advanced behaviour management training for all staff (teachers, Principals and assistants) and follow-up support implementing strategies and/or programs.

2.7 A prerequisite of working in regional, rural and remote schools should be pre-service training on the topic: "living and working in a regional, rural or remote Australia"

A huge consideration for recruiting and retaining any regional, rural or remote school staff is the provision of pre-service knowledge and support surrounding the topic: living and working in a regional, rural or remote Australia (the advantages and the challenges). This will ensure teachers are better informed before they accept the position and experience less culture shock throughout their service.

Parent feedback puts teachers and the quality of teaching as the priority for our country schools. It is thought that good teachers can be a buffer to some of the issues faced with regional, rural and remote education, and that great teachers will actually use the remoteness and culture of the community they teach in to enhance the curriculum, providing students with local connections to education and pathways to further their education.

Teachers who are able to connect well with their student's families and their student's communities are respected, appreciated and seen as easy to approach when issues arise. These teachers are viewed by families as allies in their children's education.

In country areas the familiarity and closeness of a community can be intimidating to new teachers, as it can be supporting. Teachers coming to small communities who are not familiar with this lifestyle require training for this; it is somewhat of a culture shift not to have a certain amount of anonymity after school hours. Teachers who are able to navigate this well have a much easier transition into small communities.

2.8 Provision of relief teachers

A recurring issue is that there is a lack of relief teachers in country areas. Regional, rural and remote teachers are, at times, restricted in attending professional development sessions or taking students on excursions because there is no one to cover their classes.

When teachers are absent, due to one of these reasons or illness, internal relief is then used. As well as a full teaching load for a week, teachers are expected to take extra classes placing even more pressure on them. Providing regional, rural and remote schools with relief teachers would take a lot of pressure off teachers and allow them to focus more on their students.

2.9 Teachers need periodic travelling opportunities, local opportunities wherever possible, as well as sufficient funding to cover professional development needs.

For any professional in regional, rural and remote Australia it can be challenging to access professional development when being geographically and technologically isolated – there are fewer opportunities to network with peers, fewer opportunities to attend sessions/forums nearby, and travelling can be problematic when juggling work commitments, family life and logistics. The solution to this may be in having periodic travelling opportunities (a few times per year) plus looking for local opportunities wherever possible, as well as sufficient funding to cover professional development needs. ICT is another way teachers can access professional development opportunities.

2.10 Review permanent contracting for schools in regional, rural and remote areas

In the variety of views that were fed back to WACSSO, there were some calls to eliminate the 'permanent' appointment of teachers, with our affiliates observing that teachers who have permanency can become complacent in their enthusiasm towards and delivery of teaching. WACSSO has confidence in the WA Department of Education in ensuring that the performance of all staff is being effectively managed.

2.11 Initiate a teacher mentor program between country and metropolitan teachers.

This could look like the following:

> During the course of a school year, each visits the other school to work alongside the other teacher for the week. Develop best practice for both metropolitan and country staff and share experience and observation through an online forum, could be a social media network specifically for teachers (e.g. closed Facebook group).

Teacher sharing between regional, rural and remote schools with a minimum 3-5 year dedication was a similar suggestion.

Any mentoring program or community of practice needs to acknowledge the additional time that participating in the program puts onto the mentor. To administer an online forum and provide genuinely timely and responsive support is time consuming and the success of any

mentoring program needs the mentor to be adequately resourced. The same is true for any online forums and/or communities of practice. The facilitators of such groups need to be carefully selected for their ability to support others and given adequate time to perform their duties.

2.12 Rural and remote schools need access to the equivalent of Engagement Centres

Dealing with students who have behavioural issues in schools that are socially disadvantaged has a huge impact on teacher wellbeing. Schools lose graduate teachers every year because they feel they are not being appropriately supported. Rural and remote schools need access to the equivalent of Engagement Centres that metropolitan and regional schools have, in order to appropriately cater for students with behavioural issues.

3. Leaders and leadership

Leadership in schools does not only equate to Principals and other Administration staff. Whether it is a group of people, a lesson, an initiative or a program, all school staff should be supported in their capacity to lead.

The money factor is certainly important, with a lot of feedback suggesting subsidised housing and other incentives to attract and retain quality leadership. However, we need to employ innovative approaches to ensure quality leadership in country schools is supported beyond financial assistance and incentive. Especially considering that the association between salary and job satisfaction is very weak.[ix] Most leaders are driven by autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Leadership in rural, remote and even regional schools comes with the unique challenges that have been previously discussed in this submission. Isolation, workload and the added responsibility of being a leader in the community require strong regional support networks for school leaders and adequate staffing in schools so that Principals can fulfil their duties.

Principals, deputies and senior teachers are often requested by community groups to represent the school at a variety of events and functions, ranging from ANZAC services to local sports awards. They are sought out by local community leaders for their input into a variety of issues that impact young people and families. It is essential these individuals are trained in liaising with families and community.

A survey of regional, rural and remote Principals to find out what motivates them to work and stay in country schools, would be beneficial in developing attraction and retention

programs. The results should be sorted into the respective regional, rural or remote category in order to target these areas specifically - as mentioned earlier, what works for a regional school on the coast will likely fail in an inland, remote school.

3.1 School leaders should maintain a "grass roots identity" by spending more time observing in classrooms and being present

Principals and other Administration staff should be supported to provide their presence and supervision, as it can indeed influence and improve teaching, as well as create a school culture of support and teamwork. By being present, physically and otherwise, the high-visibility of school leaders will lead to familiarity and trust.[x] This presence can only be achieved if leaders are adequately allocated with support staff and time.

See '3.4 School administrators in small rural and remote schools should not be entirely exempt from teaching' for further information on the role of the Principal in the classroom.

3.2 Level 3 and 4 schools should have adequate office staff to provide additional administration support for their Principals.

Following the previous recommendation, Principals should be supported by adequate office staff (in numbers and ability) in order to spend time being present and supervising.

3.3 School administrators in small rural and remote schools should not be entirely exempt from teaching.

We received a mix of feedback in relation to whether or not Principals and other administration staff should be required to teach. Some affiliates call for adequate resourcing of country schools so that Principals and administration staff are not expected to teach and/or relief teach on a regular basis. However, others have asked for the Department of Education to acknowledge the need for small rural and remote school Principals to take on a portion of teaching loads. This is born out of the fact that many rural and remote schools have strained budgets and are experiencing a current push to keep the Principals in the office, which means the teachers are left to deal with large multi-age classes with little or no support from an EA. Having School Administrators assist with the teaching load in large multi-age classes would potentially alleviate the pressure of teaching the full curriculum in such a diverse group of students with a variety of needs and requirements. We suggest this isn't a focus for these Principals, but a couple of times a week to assist teachers who are overloaded.

Following this, if the principal is an experienced teacher they may provide some of the best teaching available to students and this shouldn't be lost. Also (if the school is quite small) students may end up with the same teacher for many consecutive years, so the principal teaching a few lessons will increase the range of teachers students encounter. Seeing an

experienced teacher in action can provide excellent mentoring for new teachers. We are conscious that this all takes time; however, there are many benefits to supporting principals in small schools in other ways so that they can still do some teaching and we should be encouraging this.

3.4 Opportunity for suitable high performing Principals to undertake a leadership/mentor type role to assist, guide and support underperforming schools. Programs need to be sustainable and not dependant on an individual.

In order to attract and retain experienced educational leaders for country schools, our affiliates suggest raising the pay, categorisation and recognition of Principals in regional, rural and remote schools so that Principals don't feel the need to move elsewhere for higher level schools and pay packets. Affiliates have also suggested incentivising experienced Principals to move to these schools for a set term of at least 3 or 4 years through increased pay, free or heavily subsidised accommodation and allowances and a metropolitan school placement on return.

3.5 Ensure resources, support services and professional development is continually being updated to ensure positive working and learning environments are being maintained.

Attracting and retaining experienced educational leaders often comes when they feel supported by their district directors and communities. Many of the issues and recommendations relating to the provision of professional development in Section 2: Teachers and Teaching also apply here. For instance, "Teachers need periodic travelling opportunities, local opportunities (wherever possible), as well as sufficient funding to cover professional development needs."

3.6 School communities should be fostering an Act-Belong-Commit atmosphere in order to support high quality leadership for regional, rural and remote school communities

Originating in WA, Act-Belong-Commit[xi] is a community-based health promotion campaign that encourages people to take action to improve their mental health and wellbeing. This evidence-based campaign was developed primarily from research undertaken by Curtin University into people's perceptions of mental health and the behaviours they believed protected and promoted good mental health. Following a successful pilot phase in six regional communities in Western Australian (2005–2007), the campaign was expanded state-wide. Schools should be using this Act-Belong-Commit practice to support high quality leadership.

This will contribute to fostering an atmosphere of being valued, appreciated, supported and "backed up" by your employer, leaders and stakeholders/community.

4. Schools and Community

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008) states that:

> "Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. Schools share this responsibility with students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers."[xii]

In recognition of this collective responsibility, it is important for schools to lead by example and to foster these partnerships with their community.

State School Organisations provide an outstanding service to our public education system and should be supported to effectively fulfil their legislated duties. To provide some context around the importance of State School Organisations and their role in supporting education, our 2015 survey of Parents and Citizens (P&C) Associations found that in 2014 P&Cs donated in excess of an estimated $15 million to West Australian schools in funds and resources. Survey results also showed volunteers assisting with school and P&C activities gave their time at an average rate of 68.58 hours per week per school in 2014, with an increase to 74.26 hours projected for 2015 - almost two full time jobs per school. Volunteers donated more than 2.1 million hours to Western Australian public schools in 2015. This is the workforce equivalent of 1417 staff working a 38 hour week for the 40 weeks of the school year.

At present, there is a perception that the public education system does not support good outcomes, or provide incentive for teachers to raise the standard of education. A number of our affiliates reported that many primary school teachers living and working in regional, rural and remote communities are there with their own children and partners. Many of them decide to leave the region once their children are in the secondary school age group. Therefore, quality staff with secondary school aged children is often lacking.

Many regional, rural and remote communities who have a local senior school report a lack of confidence in the quality of secondary education provided, meaning that many families will choose not to send their children to the local secondary school. The challenge of secondary education in regional, rural and remote Australia has been described as a "chicken and the egg" conundrum by one of our Pilbara affiliates. If more parents collectively decided to use the local secondary school, with high expectations for their

children's educational outcomes, we would start to see the standard rise. Evidently, this is a damaging perception that, whether unfounded or otherwise, needs a strategy to rectify the very real negative, ongoing impact it has on the quality of education in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Schools are an integral part of small communities and are well placed to have a positive influence. Therefore schools must ask of themselves: "How do we wish to empower the community we are a part of?"

4.1 State Departments of Education must ensure school organisations (Parents and Citizens, Councils and Boards) are receiving adequate training and support to maximise the benefit of school and community partnerships.

Whilst this applies to all school organisations across Australia, it is particularly relevant in our regional, rural and remote areas where the school is often the lifeblood of the community. We must acknowledge that effective school organisations perform better and achieve their legislated outcomes when they are supported in their endeavours. Where they are compliant and effective, these school organisations have the potential to greatly benefit students, the Principal and the School Administration.

In Western Australia, Parents & Citizens (P&C) Associations are incorporated bodies and legal entities in their own right. They have three objects underneath the Education Act 1999:

> The objects of an association are to promote the interests of the school or group of schools for which it is formed through —
> (a) cooperation between parents, teachers, students and members of the general community;
> (b) assisting in the provision of resources, facilities and amenities for the school or schools; and
> (c) the fostering of community interest in educational matters[xiii]

For a school community who embraces their P&C, these objects deliver many educational benefits for our students. For example, P&Cs in Western Australia donate millions of dollars a year to the public education system as well as countless hours of volunteered time.

Under the same act, all Government schools are required to have a Council (or Board under the Independent Public School [IPS] system). The Education Act 1999 states that:

> 125. (1) A government school is to have a Council unless it is exempted by the Minister under section 126.[xiv]

Given that a school council or board is a legislated requirement, training for School Council and 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.

WACSSO acknowledges our State Government's commitment to provide fully funded training to School Councils and Boards, as well as their funding of WACSSO to deliver training and advice to State School Organisations in order to support parent participation in public schooling - this includes working with State School Organisations to effectively and efficiently support their local public schools.

4.2 Rural and remote schools should be given financial assistance to purchase and maintain a school bus

There are greater costs involved for rural and remote schools to have students participate in regional learning experiences such as sporting activities, career workshops and subject specific activities. Fuel, bus drivers (or the requirement for school staff to become bus drivers), teacher time (often arriving back at school after school hours) and owning their own bus all incur significant costs.

4.3 Develop a model for a program that invites community members into the classroom to share life lessons or support the lesson of the day

Students in regional, rural and remote settings are at a disadvantage when it comes to incursions and opportunity for enrichment. One way to combat this, and to strengthen the school's relationship with community, is to have members of the community come in and share a life skill; whether it be how to write a resume, how to cook a meal, how to iron a shirt or how to budget out in the real world.

Many students have the credits to obtain further education but need support with social or life skills. If given the opportunity, vetted community members would be more than happy to donate a few hours a month to impart their collective wisdom to the next generation.

We must allow the community to be a part of the school, give the community a sense of responsibility over the school and encourage the community to take students 'under their wing' in every stage of their schooling. This can be done effectively by ensuring school-community partnerships are built wherever possible.

Our affiliates have also called for a focus on financial literacy in the curriculum as well as developing self-reliance in schools. Many parents and carers already cater to student needs on these fronts, but for those students who don't have this support and guidance at home, we should be looking to formalise the incorporation of life skills in the curriculum. Our affiliates have suggested implementing the teaching of life skills by community members in order to further benefit any student transitioning from secondary education into either employment or further education. A financial literacy program could be run by community members.

4.4 Employ leaders who demonstrate knowledge of effective communication and understand the importance of creating partnerships with parents and community

A quality leader will build this into the culture of the school so that all staff embrace this as a standard part of school operation. WACSSO encourages Departments of Education to place a greater importance on fostering parental engagement into all training for Principals and school leaders.

4.5 Involve school organisations in consultation wherever possible in order to engage the wider community

The practice of involving State School Organisations and school communities should always be encouraged. Many State School Organisations, such as P&Cs, are often invited to strategic planning sessions with local government. There are many ways school communities and P&Cs can be consulted. For example, an automatic P&C rep on the School Board or Council is a good starting place. Many schools employ the use of online surveys as an inexpensive, easy way to gauge community sentiments. Online surveys may not suit schools in remote areas. In the instance where parents may not have access to, or literacy in, digital technology, time should be taken to meet with families and community members in a comfortable, open environment. In saying this, another consideration is that all school communication, including everything from strategic plans to letters in the school bag, should be genuinely accessible in language and location.

4.6 Schools, communities and local governments should share facilities and human resources where resourcing gaps exist

In some regional areas of Western Australia we see strong cooperation between the school and local government. There are good examples of shared facilities, such as libraries, where the school and community work together to provide a well utilised service. It not only makes sound economic sense for these types of arrangements to be in place it also builds stronger connections between the school and wider community. Many libraries deliver programs and activities to engage early childhood (0-3) and families, this is an integral part of their learning and something which should be strongly supported and promoted by governments. A modern library is an essential community resource and provides extensive support for students. One such example of a successful school and local community partnership is the shared Community Library at Eaton Community College and the Shire of Dardanup. [xv]

School libraries and specialist spaces (e.g. science laboratories) should be a modern, dynamic resource for students and teachers. The library experience should include a dedicated FTE to a qualified Librarian. This role is part of the teaching team; they work

towards ensuring the school Library provides valuable support to the curriculum being taught. A qualified Librarian is a valuable resource to the whole school community.

4.7 Ensure school grounds and facilities are well maintained, modern and inviting

When infrastructure, facilities and school grounds are not being maintained, the impression is that the school, the community and the children specifically, are not worth the expenditure. Often in our rural and remote towns, the experience is that school buildings and facilities are not well maintained and are in poor condition. This only hastens the decline in school, and community, populations by contributing to the false perception that education in these schools is poor quality.

4.8 We need to ensure opportunities are provided for students to experience the world and prospects outside of their communities through incursions, excursions and camps

Providing opportunities to access learning in a variety of ways from a variety of sources, not just the teachers on staff, motivates regional, rural and remote students to succeed by supplying them with positive aspirations. This includes an array of options. From accessing visiting authors, artists or similar and partaking in specialised sports workshops, to working on projects with other schools, universities and TAFE colleges online. By creating links with metropolitan schools, organisations and initiatives, including international, students' worldview will widen.

4.9 All secondary students should have access to teachers who provide meaningful career counselling

The secondary school years are a difficult time for many adolescents. One of the great challenges for teenagers is knowing what to do after they leave school. The job of schools is to both educate and guide in this transition and this is specialist work best undertaken by a teacher with some training in career counselling. Students who don't receive support with this can find themselves directionless at school, which often leads them to be disruptive and in some cases to disengage from school totally. Another outcome for students who do not receive adequate career guidance is that they leave school without having studied the subjects required for the job or further education that they wish to pursue.

It is critical that students in regional, rural and remote areas are provided with career guidance advice from people who both respect and honour the traditional industries of the region in which they are working, while being able to also introduce students to options beyond that region, should that be of interest to the student.

4.10 Look within the community to find human resources that will enrich student learning

There is a huge amount of untapped potential in our in rural and remote settings. There are parents with a variety of educational knowledge, previous careers, local trades etc. that are not being utilised as part of the learning in schools. By looking within the community, schools will find many human resources with varying education and experience both professionally and technically.

Relationships with Not-For-Profits, such as Lions Clubs, Rotary Australia clubs, Country Women's Association and more, are another inexpensive way for schools to utilise community resources. Similarly, collaborations between schools and business are another way to unlock potential learning opportunities, particularly in relation to STEM. For instance, some country schools could partner with the likes of Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton.

4.11 Develop partnerships between government agencies and philanthropic or not-for-profit organisations to creatively raise and donate money to the education sector

The philanthropic sector does not often support small rural and remote schools as they cannot offer wide exposure or advertising. This is unfortunate given that the donation of philanthropic funds have the power to greatly influence the educational outcomes of students in these communities. Partnerships between underperforming rural and remote schools and businesses are mutually beneficial: greater levels of achievement, improved educational outcomes and reputation building.

An example of effective philanthropic contributions to education is in 2017, a partnership between the Water Corporation and Aboriginal development organisation, Wunan, raised $28,260 in funding to help support female Aboriginal students from the East Kimberley with their education expenses.[xvi] This support includes assisting 30 Aboriginal female students with tutoring services for science, technology and mathematics subjects, and other essential items.

Funding was raised by the sale of Rhodes grass hay, produced at the West Australian Water Corporation's Broome North Wastewater Treatment Plant with recycled water used to irrigate the crop.

The Water Corporation also uses funds raised by the sale of Rhodes grass hay for a community grants scheme for not-for-profit groups and schools in the West Kimberley, and has so far contributed more than $80,000 to community projects.

5. Information and Communication Technology

Strong Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is paramount if we want to provide equitable access to education and enrichment opportunities for regional, rural and remote students. ICT is the bridge that connects our regional, rural and remote students with the rest of the world. Technology is constantly advancing and our students need to keep up with current technology and trends to help them with life after school and employment. Unfortunately, the reality is that technology is lacking in many areas – a truth Australia wide, for metropolitan and country areas alike. Internet bandwidths are inadequate and affect student and staff access. Other agencies that provide these services to regional, rural and remote areas need to make sure the required hardware to improve this is available.

The curriculum and educational landscape is growing increasingly more digital. With the intent to move tests like NAPLAN online the vast disparities in ICT provisions across schools is of great concern. While this is not a problem isolated to regional, rural and remote schools, we know the issue is compounded in many of these schools due to their location.

Currently, regional, rural and remote schools have to pay huge amounts of money to get technical support in schools that the department isn't able to cover. This is incredibly expensive when travel time is factored in to charges by school integrators, costs that city schools don't have to pay. This results in many country schools not doing anything to fix or improve the ICT within their school as there is often not the expertise within the school to do it, and the schools can't afford to get technicians out to help.

This creates a very inequitable system, where metropolitan schools are continually advantaged through their access to cost effective and readily available technical support, in addition to internet connectivity and speeds. It is logical to argue that rural and remote schools have an even greater need than metropolitan schools for fast and reliable internet in order to connect them to the wider world and increase their learning opportunities.

In many regional, rural and remote West Australian schools, subjects are delivered via the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). It is imperative for this type of distance education that Information Technology capability, computer hardware and network access is reliable.

The Federal Government and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) need to upgrade and install the relevant infrastructure and networks to ensure reliable, high speed internet to rural and remote schools.

In Western Australia, slow or unreliable internet and ageing student devices in schools is undermining the achievement of Department of Education's Standard Operating Environment (SOE) vision. The main barriers to regional, rural and remote schools realising the full potential benefits of ICT include:

- access to the internet, speed of the internet and unreliability of the service makes learning difficult and frustrating, these barriers are reinforced by a lack of funding and support from the government and Department of Education to ensure that all schools and their communities have equal access to fast, reliable internet,
- old, poorly maintained ICT equipment,
- delays in time taken to remedy ICT issues,
- lack of training and support in ICT for staff members, and
- lack of information regarding new product or delivery method.

5.1 Multiple agency sharing of ICT technicians

In regional, rural and remote areas there should be greater collaboration, particularly between state government agencies, to work together for a common goal. Collectively, agencies could cover a greater full-time equivalent that may result in better attraction of a suitable staff member to the area.

For remote schools, shared ICT technicians could be provided by a flying ICT team. This team would be responsible for regular onsite visits to remote schools.

5.2 All schools should continue to be well resourced with devices, infrastructure and teacher development

Students who do not use technology in the home, for a variety of reasons, fall behind their peers. Living remote compounds the issue. This is why it is so important for schools to be well resourced with devices, infrastructure, and teacher development; and to provide students with resources to use technology for truly current, vibrant and engaging learning experiences, as well as facilitating homework. The financial responsibility of resourcing devices should never burden families through a compulsory Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) or Personally Owned Device (POD) requirement. Where BYOD and POD programs are in place, families should always be provided with adequate cost free options.

5.3 Technology is another area where cooperation between schools and existing facilities such as Libraries and Community Resource Centres (CRCs) could relieve the burden from families and maximise access for students

An example of this recommendation in action comes from one of our affiliated schools where they ran a 'Homework Club' at the school library two afternoons a week. This was an

excellent program for students, as computers and safe internet was available for them to do their homework on. On top of this, teachers were made available to answer questions and give assistance and parents were invited to come along also so that they could understand their children's work, especially high school math.

5.4 Identify, train and support 'ICT Champions' in the school

Targeted and ongoing ICT training for teaching and learning support staff is essential for the successful delivery of an increasingly digital, and digitally reliant, curriculum. Installing new technology without teacher and staff training on how to utilise said technology is redundant.

For ICT to be used effectively in schools, teachers and learning support staff must have the ability to use digital technologies well. By identifying a school based ICT go-to person, an 'ICT Champion,' the gap in local ICT human resources will be less noticeable. This person should not be seen as the "fixer" of all IT issues, rather they should be able to mentor the use of technologies in the classroom and demonstrate innovative digital practices that enhance learning. Ideally, such a person would exist in each school and be part of a regional network, able to source professional development and, by the nature of their connection, identify common regional issues and implement regionally based solutions. It is important that the 'ICT Champion' be allocated sufficient time to assist and support colleagues and to fulfil their role.

5.5 Where successful ICT programs and initiatives are implemented, schools must ensure they are sustainable

Teachers are busy individuals. With little to no incentive for colleagues to pick up extra workload, or lack of specialist knowledge amongst the staff cohort, when a teacher leaves a school community, often any initiatives they led leave too. This high turnover of programs and initiatives inspires lack of faith in the system on a student and family level. It is a demoralising process that only accelerates the rate of decline; decline in population, employment opportunity, school and town maintenance.

5.6 Learn from WA's telehealth model when designing rural and remote education services

Western Australia's Telehealth enables more public patients to access specialist outpatient and acute care in their local regional community. Telehealth links regionally-based patients and medical staff via videoconferencing to specialist health professionals based in the metropolitan area or elsewhere. A similar model could be applied to the education system in a variety of ways, and in some cases it already is being utilised. It would allow access to school psychologists and other allied health professionals, but should always be consolidated with some face-to-face care or instruction.

5.7 Provide support to schools in adopting streamlined school management software and digital communication platforms in order to reach and communicate with families

This enables schools to communicate more effectively with parents and carers through the use of digital technology, which is especially crucial given that a lot of rural and remote parents have less face-to-face contact with their child's classroom teachers.

6. Entrepreneurship and schools

6.1 State Departments of Education and Local Governments should be active in establishing relationships between schools and industry

The leadership teams in regional schools carry a significant workload already, taking Principals out of their schools so that they can build industry relationships is not an effective solution, so who will do it for them? Industry alliances need to be built at the regional level with the support of Department of Education and local government.

6.2 Professional development and resources are needed for a school or group of schools to specialise in entrepreneurial education

Support is needed in the form of teacher time allocation to be able to support a learning program in this area. It is often overlooked or pushed aside due to the huge burden of all the other curriculum areas.

6.3 Both sides, industry and education, must drive and resource entrepreneurial education opportunities

Opportunities through Tourism, Creative Industries, Cultural Industries, Conservation, Local Government, Agriculture, Mining etc. all exist, what is lacking is facilitators who build the bridge between industry and education. Both sides must drive the program and both sides must resource the programs. Industry should see this as investment into sustainability and growth, education needs to see it as enhancing the curriculum.

6.4 Focus on issues that affect the local area as an avenue to inspire students into entrepreneurial activities

Schools need to identify local issues or topics of interest and develop entrepreneurial education opportunities around them. For example, in rural Western Australia many farming families are interested in climate science. This can be used to enhance student learning. Linking schools with organisations who work in this space and developing collaborations between scientific organisations and students will increase their world perspective, increase innovative thinking and provide opportunities to problem solve. Another positive is that it fosters relationships with people outside the local area.

6.5 Host lessons on analysing the local job market and identifying entrepreneurial opportunities

Looking to see what opportunities or gaps exists in the local area. Identify gaps in service delivery i.e. grocery store, start to think about what it would take to establish one in a classroom setting from planning, to costings, implementation, design and running of the business.

7. Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education, boarding

7.1 Proposed school closures or reorganisations should be informed by a comprehensive review that considers all potential short and long term impacts and outcomes

The aim of any school reorganisation (including clustering, closures, amalgamation, or relocation of individual year students) should be to improve the quality of education for all students. The essential importance of neighbourhood schooling should not be compromised. Closures or reorganisations should never be solely proposed on the basis of cost savings.

The topic of super schools is controversial for our affiliate base. Where there is an amalgamation of smaller schools the pervasive multi-age classroom practice is eliminated, thereby providing students with consistent and targeted learning and relieving pressure on teachers. However, school closures have a hugely detrimental effect on the morale and viability of small regional, rural and remote communities. It also means students often have to travel great distances to access a face-to-face education. Because of the detrimental effects school closures have on community and family, great caution should be exercised if being considered and a decision to proceed only entered into under the most dire of circumstances, following extensive community consultation.

7.2 Wherever possible, schools should avoid multi-age classrooms and should be funded to a level that facilitates this

Some parents, teachers and students struggle with multi-age classroom arrangements. In order to provide equitable access to education for our students in small country schools, we must ensure they are being taught in classrooms that do not span an unreasonable number of year groups. This environment is not conducive to effective learning and schools need the staffing allocation to instruct and manage classrooms accordingly.

Where there are small schools, and there is a requirement for multi-age classrooms we must ensure they are well resourced with age appropriate materials for all students. Such

classrooms should be staffed by teachers and EAs who have been trained in strategies to maximise the outcomes and minimise the constraints of a multi-age classroom context.

7.3 The establishment of clusters should be flexible and in response to a demonstrated need

Clusters are formed when a number of schools come together for a specific purpose. Clusters are generally seen as a positive initiative, allowing schools to collaborate more and work within the region/district to develop consistent social, sporting and learning programs that have longevity. Having program consistency across regional, rural and remote schools enables greater collaboration, sharing of resources and networking between school staff.

Many regional, rural and remote schools participate in cluster-type arrangements for:

- Professional Development for staff
- STEM programs (for example, initiatives such as an annual 2 day camp followed by a 1 day presentation of projects)
- Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) for students who are Gifted and Talented
- School camps
- Sporting calendar
- Social events
- Combined incursions/excursions

Many of these activities are school initiated and funded partially by parents and/or their P&C Associations, either financially, in terms of resources such as transport, or both. They enable students to participate in a wider range of educational experiences and provide them with the opportunity to socialise and work with peers outside their small communities.

8. Diversity

8.1 Ensure diversity of choice - particularly in secondary schools

Diversity of choice is a key factor in providing educational opportunity, promoting the public school system and attracting and retaining school populations and staff. Resourcing of schools should account for diversity of choice. This could include teaching staff, ICT, shared facilities and more.

8.2 Ensure Gifted and Talented students are appropriately catered for

It's important to recognise that students with exceptional ability are individuals, with their own unique strengths and weaknesses. A student may be considered exceptional in some areas, but may require additional support in others. It is important to recognise that

students may require support with behavioural, social, physical/sensory or specific learning difficulties. Direct intervention is particularly critical for these students because giftedness may only emerge when the appropriate opportunities are provided. All opportunities must be seized to enrich student learning in order to stop underachievement amongst the most able students.

The education system needs to ensure parity between opportunities offered to students at selective schools and opportunities offered to students with exceptional ability throughout the government school system, ensuring that all are nurtured and challenged irrespective of their post code. This can be achieved through staffing, digital programs, distance education and cluster arrangements.

8.3 Engage parents, carers and families in the curriculum making process to create positive partnerships and links between home and school learning environments

The role of education in remote communities is to prepare students to independently live and work within the location of their choice as lifelong learners. As per the findings of 'Red Dirt Curriculum: Re-imaging Remote Education,' educational success hinges on the involvement and engagement of families and community in education. In order to engage parents and carers of our remote students, our education systems need to acknowledge their cultural, linguistic and social diversities. The work of Dr Debbie Pushor explores family and community engagement as vehicle to improve the outcomes of students. Pushor recommends curriculum design is influenced by community and family funds of knowledge:

"The teacher's curriculum making may be extended further by parents and families into the curriculum making process, draw on the wealth of parent knowledge and the "funds of knowledge" resident in members of the community. In co-planning curricular experiences with parents, teachers create space in which family members become part of the facilitation of teaching and learning activities for and with children."[xvii]

8.4 Strategies and funding for combating the detrimental, ongoing effects that health related issues, like otitis media and resulting hearing loss, has on our Indigenous students

Indigenous ear and hearing health is in a state of emergency in Australia. Indigenous Australians suffer ear disease and hearing loss up to ten times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians, and at the highest rate of any people in the world. Rates of suffering far exceed the 4 per cent threshold at which disease is regarded as a major public health issue (as defined by the World Health Organisation). Not to mention, hearing loss as a result of ear disease is highly preventable.

Otitis media (OM) is the most common ear disease affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. OM involves an inflammation/infection of the middle ear typically caused by bacterial and viral pathogens, with varying degrees of severity and often resulting in temporary or permanent hearing loss.[xviii]

Statistics show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students living in urban, rural and, particularly, remote areas are more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be afflicted with OM younger, more often, at a greater level of severity, and with more likelihood of further complications.[xix] Staggeringly, ear infections, such as OM, are responsible for the majority of hearing problems with lifelong consequences, many of which are preventable and treatable.[xx] For instance, we know that hearing loss is a major contributor to risk factors predisposing ATSI children to contact with the criminal justice system.[xxi] The causal link between hearing impairment and criminal activity has been identified as poor educational outcomes.[xxii] Evidence suggests that 'impaired language development and the stigmatising effects of hearing impairment on self-concept and social skills' also has causal links with criminal activity.[xxiii]

In order to improve outcomes for ATSI children we need to provide them with access to quality education. This includes facilitating learning environments that monitor and cater for hearing loss, including providing adequate classroom facilities, like sound field amplification systems, and specific training for educators.

8.5 Implement a strategy to improve attendance of Indigenous students in regional, rural and remote schools

There is growing concern in the West Australian Goldfields, and across our rural, regional and remote communities, that young Aboriginal students are regularly missing school as they move across the lands with their families. There are a lot of students who are brought into Kalgoorlie from the lands by their parents and carers for a whole number of reasons (funerals, hospital visits, welfare, etc.) and most of these students miss their schooling whilst in Kalgoorlie.

East Kalgoorlie Primary School has a program for "visiting" students and offers a pick-up and drop off service. Similar programs exist in many of our regional areas, particularly through the Kimberley, North West and Mid West. However, most don't request the pick-up so the students do not attend class. This happens a number of times throughout the year and students miss quite a lot of schooling due to these travels.

There needs to be encouragement for the parents to ensure that their students attend school when they are away from their own land and communities. It has been noted that this can be problematic, as some mobs don't/won't associate with one another. Therefore,

there are cultural sensitivities that need to be respected in any strategizing. Not an easy solution to be had, but just one of the issues that confront education in the Goldfields and other regional, rural and remote areas. It may be just as simple as expanding the East Kalgoorlie program to several schools so there is not that cultural clash. There also needs to be an improvement in the tracking and attendance systems of the Department of Education, both in terms of follow up for students with chronic non-attendance and for a school with visiting students to access their academic records and have the ability to plan and deliver an appropriate education program.

The advent of indigenous programs, especially sports programs, in schools have assisted in raising school attendance for some Aboriginal students. These programs are also linked to educational outcomes, students are being encouraged to succeed and remain part of the programs they enjoy. Expansion of these programs to all schools would no doubt benefit students across country Western Australia. Some parents however have raised concerns that the focus can be too heavily placed on sporting participation and less on academia, which is not beneficial in regards to life after school, further education and employment. There needs to be an appropriate balance and evidence based approach to lifting attendance through effective participation and improved outcomes.

9. Transitioning beyond school

9.1 Explore ways to creatively offer more VET options
The VET pathway provides Year 11 and 12 students with certificates, which helps them transition beyond high school with a head start in their chosen career. Students should have the opportunity to study the areas that they are interested in, not just what has historically been offered. Courses need to change depending on the current enrolments. Schools should be able to offer more certificate courses without the students having to pay huge fees.

9.2 Improve the delivery of mental health services in order to brighten student outlooks
Our affiliates have highlighted a number of social and cultural factors that contribute to poor mental health, resilience and self-confidence issues. We need to not only ensure that schools are funded to hire chaplains, councillors and other relevant student support staff (as decided on a local level using local knowledge), but that they are being supported to deliver this service. Some of our affiliates have indicated that, whilst schools are allocated funds to provide mental health services to their school community, the logistics of employing a full or part time mental health worker make it very difficult to do so. In support of this, we need to see mental health in the curriculum tailored to address the specific

needs of the context in which it is being delivered. By improving mental health and wellbeing and building resilience and self confidence in regional, rural and remote students, we will see an improvement in student outcomes, and an improvement in their post school opportunities.

9.3 Broaden regional, rural and remote student contact with external groups

In order to improve post school opportunities for regional, rural and remote students, schools should be fostering more linkages with universities, global cities, metropolitan schools, virtual classrooms (possibly implementing SIDE learning as a supplement to lessons) as well as being funded to supply greater opportunity for excursions. Excursions should include places like TAFE and universities (as well as other education and training providers), so from an early age senior school students will be familiar and informed of the range of further education and career paths available.

9.4 Increase opportunity for scholarships, accommodation assistance, employment/internship assistance and market the options

Another way to improve the post school opportunities for regional, rural and remote young people would be to offer scholarships based on virtuous behaviours (e.g. attendance, marks throughout the year, moral integrity/character) rather than just an ATAR score. This is not to say that scholarship allocations be removed from gifted regional, rural and remote students, but that more opportunity should be offered to those who strive hard in their endeavours. Scholarships based on hardship are also available. Some schools promote scholarship opportunities extremely well, where others not at all. It is imperative that schools are effectively informed of all scholarship opportunities available so that they can promote these with their students.

9.5 Ensure boarding facilities based in regional, rural or remote areas are well maintained and modern

Boarding facilities in towns with schools big enough to sustain them are considered incredibly beneficial and provide an integral service to families in the area. Similar to the topic discussed in '4.7 Ensure school grounds and facilities are well maintained, modern and inviting,' poorly maintained boarding facilities contribute to the false perception that education in these schools is poor quality and they are not worth the expenditure. Not to mention, students living away from home should have access to comfortable, safe environments in order to heighten their educational outcomes.

9.6 Strategy to deal with damaging media and perceptions around staying in remote communities

This strategy should include programs that support local people to train and become employed for positions available in their local area. We need to see an increase in the creation of jobs for local people outside of what is currently offered. This could include positions in health, education and social work. Not to mention, improving overall health care and provision, in turn health and social conditions improve.

9.7 Local governments to develop employment opportunity catalogues for young people

An audit and register of existing employment opportunities is a mutually beneficial initiative. A catalogue of employment opportunities in local and surrounding areas, including the required pathways to access them, is a positive initiative for both students transitioning beyond school and local governments looking to attract residents.

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