

SCHOOL FUNDING

Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house calls on the government to recognise the impact of its cuts to schools in 2014 and revisit the further proposed cut to 30 per cent of schools in 2015.

The motion before the house today has two parts. It calls on the government to recognise the impact of the cuts in 2014 and, on the basis of that, to revisit the proposed further cuts to another 30 per cent of schools in 2015 under the new model. I am referring to the cuts in 2014 because the changes happening in 2015 are not occurring in a vacuum. The WA Labor position in respect of the new student funding model is on the public record. I put that on the public record before the model was announced and I will put it on the public record again: the Labor Party supports a model of funding for schools that is simpler and easier for schools to manage. The Labor Party supports, and for years has been calling for, greater investment in the early years. It supports the essential thrust of the Teese report and it supports the various elements of the model. What the Labor Party does not support is the way in which the government has approached the change in relativities between secondary and primary schools that Professor Teese recommended by taking money off secondary schools to reinvest into primary schools. There is another way to adjust those relativities without taking money off secondary schools.

I am conscious that this is a time-limited debate and that I have limited time, but I have a lot to say about this matter. It is important to quickly touch on the range of cuts made to schools in 2014. Close to \$185 million worth of cuts were made to schools across a range of different areas. I do not want to revisit exactly what happened in August 2013 when those cuts were announced, but members will recall that what outraged parents and school communities was the notion that these were not cuts but were about transition when in fact they were cuts. The range of those cuts went across the board and were done in a number of ways, including: by changing a number of formula by which staff were allocated to various levels of teaching; by changing the formula to apply to the employment of Aboriginal and Islander education officers; by changing the formula to apply to those staff working in the English as a second language area and intensive English areas; by cutting by 30 per cent the school support program resource allocation—SSPRA—money; by devolving postage to schools; by concluding a number of special-purpose programs; by the finalisation of school innovation grants; by making changes to Aboriginal innovation projects; by continuing the 1.5 school procurement and travel reduction; by not indexing the non-salary components of the school grant; by ceasing supplementary funding for managing challenging behaviours previously provided to the regional office; by changing the formula of allocating staff to the schools of special educational needs, schools of isolated and distance education and the school instrumental music program; by changing the recognition of level three classroom teachers; by reducing the allocation to PEAC, the extension program for primary students; by reducing the performance management subsidy; and also, the one that of course outraged schools the most, by making changes to the long service leave liability levy and other changes to central and regional offices to the value of about \$185 million.

Schools were outraged by not only the dollar value of those cuts but also what it meant for school leaders, business managers and officers who have had to make a range of complex adjustments across the whole area of the work that they did. That has touched every single school. Members will remember the debate at the time and that the Premier came out and said that some schools will be better off and some will be worse off. I cannot name a public school that did not receive a cut in 2014 because every single school received a cut. That caused great outrage in school communities. Parents wrote to members of Parliament, the Premier and to the Minister for Education. The government's federal colleagues wrote to members of Parliament, the Premier and the Minister for Education because they, too, were receiving representations in their offices about the impact of those cuts. They really were shocking to parents. Parents were shocked by two things: one, the dishonesty at the beginning of the announcement; and, two, the service delivery cuts at the front end of schools that had not been seen before. People in the sector were talking about not having seen cuts like that to direct front-line services to schools for 30 or 40 years. At that time we were told that the purpose of the cuts was as a transition to the new school funding model that would occur as a result of the recommendations of the report by Professors Stephen Lamb and Richard Teese, out of Melbourne University, into school funding in Western Australia. The government had had that report for close to two years when it announced what it was going to do in response to it. I want to touch on the purpose of the Teese report and go through the detail of that as well.

The other thing to bear in mind at the same time, and why it was that schools were outraged about the cuts last year, is of course that there was, and had been for a number of years and will continue to be for a number of years into the future, an increase in the number of students enrolling in public schools as a result of population changes in particular. While the government was claiming it was putting more dollars into the education budget,

in fact, at the same time that more students were being added and the government was guaranteeing those students a place in the classroom, the resources the schools had to deliver high-quality education in that classroom both in staffing and in actual resources was reduced as a result of the cut. More students and less money meant less flexibility for schools to deliver the highest quality public education that we know they are capable of when they are properly resourced.

It is important to touch on some of the things that Professor Teese said. I want to focus in this debate on the element of the changes at the secondary level. He said in his report that he recognised—I do not dispute what he is saying—that the system as it has evolved over many years has become cumbersome, very complex; with lots of different buckets of money and that a simpler way to address that was needed. I take no issue with that. The report was critical of the existing funding system. I have read the report several times and I have taken the opportunity to have a discussion with Professor Teese—I have talked with him in detail about his views on the report and the government's response to the report. He said that when the staged weights—what I describe as the mathematical formula used to allocate resources to schools based on a range of different things that have evolved over time; that is, the different funding, the buckets of money across the various stages—were combined with a range of different equity funds and programs, it intensified resources in secondary schools. That is the point he made. He said that all of the research—of course, the opposition agrees with this because it has been arguing this for years—supports intense resourcing in the early years of both primary school and, as the report makes the point, secondary school. He noted that the gap between primary and secondary in Western Australia is the highest in the nation; the gap between funding for primary and secondary in other states is not as high as ours. The Teese report was about relativities; he did not say that the way to achieve those relativities and the way to achieve the change in the level of resourcing between primary and secondary was to cut every single public school in 2014, announce it partway through August 2014 and then go live in February 2015 by taking money from secondary schools. That was not in his report. His report was very specific about changing the relativities; he put no dollar values in there. He did not say that the way to achieve the change in relativities was to take money off secondary schools.

He talked about a uniform price; he did not talk about what that uniform price should be. He talked about a base allocation, enrolment tapered, to cover the minimum running costs of a school, but he did not talk about what those dollars should be. He talked about geographical and small-sized schools getting an allocation to assist them, but he did not talk about what those dollars would be. He talked about a socioeconomic disadvantage allocation, using the education and occupation of parents, but he did not talk about the dollars. He talked about funding for Indigenous students, but he did not talk about the dollars. He talked about making sure that the funding modelling included money for disability, English as a second language and refugee funding as separate line items, but he did not talk about the dollars.

At pages 96 and 97 of his report, he said that there were two clear objectives: to minimise the performance differences and maximise the progress of students. The glaring gap, however, is that there is no measurement in place to measure whether those objectives are being achieved. We are being told that we will just rely on NAPLAN results, and maybe we will; but he specifically said that we need to be able to measure. He talked about a shift in the way that the relative quantity of resources is shared—not by adjusting the formula for staffing, but by school-based decisions on the quality of teachers. Those were his words. He did not say that we would do that by adding more students, and he did not say that we should make cuts in 2014, on top of more students, and then reduce the relativities by cutting secondary students. He did not say that. He talked about how we should move to the new model.

For that measure to work well, he sets out on pages 97 and 98 of the report six measures that need to be put in place, and from what I can see, this government has followed only one of them. The measures include fully devolved financial, decision-making and accountability structures—that has happened; schools having capacity for autonomous control of staff recruitment—that certainly happens in independent public schools, but not in other schools; and financial management skills in schools being of even and high quality—they are certainly not even right now. There is training in place, but I worry that the systems will not be in place to support those people when the system goes live in February 2015. The measures continue: mechanisms for ensuring that quality and equity targets are met—there is none of those; processes in place for monitoring expenditure in relation to improvement—none of those that I have seen; and rolling benchmarks established at intervals to assess targeting and changes in cost—there is none of those that I have seen. There is certainly a new IT system, and those people who have done training on the new computer system are telling me that it looks good, but I do not know that those benchmarks and processes have been put in place.

Professor Teese also recommends that all schools must operate sound financial management practices that support the financial objectives of the model. He said that principals need to be well prepared and supported, but

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

that is not the state of mind of many principals going into 2015, thanks to the cuts and chaos of 2014. In fact, many principals are feeling a bit under siege.

In respect of Professor Teese's commentary, it is worth noting that in *The West Australian* of 28 August 2013 he was quoted as saying —

“The question I've got is whether introducing these savings measures —

That is, the cuts —

at the same time as bringing in a substantial change in the funding formula is a good idea,” he said,

“It's strange to see this happening at a time when nationally both major parties are committed to a substantial increase in school funding,”

On an ABC TV News story by Rebecca Carmody on 21 July this year, he was quoted as saying, according to my notes —

“It would do damage if we were to reduce the funding effort in state secondary schools in order to increase the effort in state primary schools—that was not part of our thinking.”

Hon Mark Lewis: So now the ABC is running the Education Department?

Hon SUE ELLERY: No, a journalist from the ABC did a story. She put the microphone up to the phone and Professor Richard Teese said the words I just read out.

Hon Mark Lewis: You said Sarah Carmody said that.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Rebecca Carmody did the story, but perhaps I will move on.

In a *The World Today* story of 30 July 2014 on ABC Online—sorry to talk about the ABC again; it is obviously a sensitive issue for some—Professor Teese was quoted as saying that he was broadly supportive of the government's changes —

But I would have preferred an approach which injected a lot more funds.

On the same program from 30 July—oh gosh, it is the ABC again; I am really sorry!—the transcript reads —

He now said that while it was not ideal to be taking funds from some schools, changes needed to be made.

“It'd be good to try to maintain as far as possible a major funding effort to assist secondary schools but I can understand why the rebalancing has to occur and I can see why those important steps have been taken,” Professor Teese said.

“In a general sense I'm supportive of it because they are going in the directions we recommended in our report.

“Some schools will lose out, in particular those schools that have benefited from the complexity of the previous regime ...

Again on 30 July, in an article on Perth Now, Professor Teese is quoted as saying —

“I don't think anyone wants to see a transfer of funds,” Mr Teese told ABC 720.

“I would have preferred an approach which injected more funds.

“Many will benefit but there will be some disappointment.”

The point I am making is that I respect the work done by Professor Teese in his report and I respect the comments that he has made, but if the government is hitching all of the benefits of this model on that stream of commentary by Professor Teese, it needs to question whether it has a ringing endorsement from Professor Teese for what it is doing. If the government thinks that that line of commentary is a ringing endorsement of the way in which it has chosen to implement the shift in the relativities, I think it is time the government adjusted its medication because there is a bit of delusion at work. I am not putting words in Professor Teese's mouth, but just from reading what he has said, it is clear that he is uncomfortable with elements of the way in which the implementation of this model is proceeding.

It is astonishing to me that the government has not put in place a better safety net to protect some of the schools that will lose money, because we are not dealing with ground zero; we are not starting from scratch. We are taking money off them after we already took money off them in 2014. Some of those schools are in not only the most economically disadvantaged areas, but also have some of the most educationally disadvantaged students. Some of these are schools that actually need greater assistance to address those issues. Some of the schools that are being affected include Albany Senior High School education support centre; Balga Senior High School;

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

Belmont City College; Bullsbrook College; Bunbury Senior High School; Carnarvon Community College; Collie Senior High School; Derby District High School—that is right, folks, we are taking money from Derby District High School; and Fitzroy Valley District High School—we took money off them as well.

Hon Ken Travers: What did the Minister for Indigenous Affairs say about that?

Hon SUE ELLERY: I wonder what he said to himself as he thought about taking money off them!

We took money off them in 2014, and we are doing it again to Fitzroy Valley DHS in 2015. Other schools include Gilmore College; Girrawheen Senior High School; Hedland Senior High School; Kambalda West District High School; Karratha Senior High School; Kununurra Senior High School; Quairading District High School; Rockingham District High School; Roebourne District High School; Southern River College; Thornlie Senior High School; Wanneroo Secondary College; Warnbro Community High School and Wyndham District High School. We are taking money off it again two years in a row, because, God knows, they have too much to spend at Wyndham District High School, and there are no educational issues there for that community. It is not right to implement this model by taking money off secondary schools in areas where there continues to be a significant educational disadvantage—it is not right. I get that the relativities have to change and I support the thrust of the model, but the way the government is implementing it, without putting in a proper and adequate safety net for those schools that need the most assistance after it ripped money off them in 2014, is wrong. The government is doing this incorrectly. It has a lot of ground to make up because it has lost a lot of ground in 2014 with parents. The government has a lot of ground to make up and there is a lot resting on this, and that is why it is spending the money on the advertising campaign; I get that. But when the government clearly demonstrates that it is taking money off schools in some of the most educationally disadvantaged areas, people will just not buy that the government is serious about implementing educational change to achieve the kind of equity that people such as Richard Teese intended would be achieved when he made the recommendations that he did when he gave the government the report.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Minister for Education) [10.31 am]: Thank you, Madam Acting President. I would like to make some —

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich: This'll be good—a hapless minister!

Hon PETER COLLIER: I would like to open my mouth, if you do not mind.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): Absolutely. Time in this debate is limited; I think we need to give each other a fair go.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I listened in compete silence and I would appreciate the same level of respect.

First of all, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing on this debate. I think it is a good debate. It is a shame we have only limited time because I have a lot to get through. Similarly to the Leader of the Opposition, I would like a lot more time to debate this issue. With regard to 2014, suffice it to say, very briefly, that as I have said consistently in 2014, we asked schools to tighten their belts on the back of unprecedented growth in funding for our schools. That has continued this year. This year we have injected another \$188 million into education. We have increased funding in education from \$2.8 billion to \$4.6 billion since we have been in office; that is a 61 per cent increase in funding. At an equivalent time we have had a 15 per cent increase in student numbers, so in anyone's language that is a significant investment in education and it is second to none across the nation. Education ministers in other jurisdictions would give their right arms to have the level of funding that we have in Western Australia, and evidence of that, of course, is the fact that Western Australia was penalised quite significantly by the previous Labor government with the Gonski funding—the fact that we were given a pittance of an offer purely because we funded our schools so well.

Having said that, we needed to do things above and beyond the significant funding that we have in Western Australia, which I said means that our students are funded better than any other students in the nation. Having said that, when \$4.6 billion is injected into an education system, we have to make sure that it is appropriately directed. Anyone in the Western Australian education sector knows that in our education system the funds are not appropriately directed. There is enormous imbalance across the board. There is a highly complex multiplier system of funding that is basically devoid of logic; it is inequitable, inefficient and unfair. The Leader of the Opposition has already gone through those various levels of multiplier and I will not waste too much more time on them. Suffice it to say that we see eye to eye on that one; the system was broken and we had to fix it. As a result of that, the government contracted the University of Melbourne to look at the funding system to try to find a better, fairer, more equitable system, and that came as a result of the fact that after decades of the current system we were prepared to do something about it.

What happened was that the report chaired by Professor Teese came down and identified the fact that there was a serious horizontal imbalance in the funding and a very, very serious vertical imbalance in the funding per

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

student. From a horizontal level, there were schools throughout Western Australia in the regions which were mirror images of each other but which had vastly different levels of funding. There was no logic behind it whatsoever, so one district high school that was very similar to another district high school would be getting half a million to a million dollars of additional funding. That was simply unpalatable; we could not allow that to continue. The same situation existed right across the state. In addition to that, serious anomalies and inequities between primary and secondary schools were identified; in fact, in Western Australia our secondary schools were funded to the tune of 38 per cent more than our primary schools, and in the areas of early intervention, particularly in preprimary and years 1, 2 and 3, there needed to be a serious injection of funds to provide the foundation skills. At the same time, our secondary level of education was funded very, very generously—as I said, 38 per cent higher than our primary schools, and in fact, in comparative terms, much higher than any other jurisdiction in the nation. As far as student-to-teacher ratios were concerned, our secondary schools were the most inefficient; that is, they had fewer students per teacher than any other state, whereas our primary schools were the most efficient. Professor Teese identified these areas—that issue with regard to the vertical and horizontal imbalance. I could go through and refer specifically to a number of findings from Professor Teese, but I simply do not have time. I recommend that members have a look at the report, particularly page 86 where he refers to the vertical–horizontal imbalance, but the whole report is worth reading.

We had to implement the changes and Professor Teese, in coming to his conclusions, did an enormous amount of consultation. He consulted with 82 schools specifically and another 300 schools provided online information, so there was an enormous amount of consultation and he came to the right conclusions. In essence, we needed to look at a complete reform of the education budget to provide schools with more flexibility, more autonomy and a one-line budget. We needed to overcome the inequities that existed at the horizontal and vertical levels so that every single child in Western Australia was treated equally and we had a situation in which a child in a mirror image of another school would be treated in the same way as a student at the other school. At the same time he provided evidence, which, again, was eminently sensible and supported by the recommendations from Gonski, that we needed to pay special attention to specific areas within our schools. Each child would get a base level of funding, and then special attention would be given to Aboriginal students, students who have English as a second language, students with disabilities, students who live in the regions in the remote areas of the state and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. There were those five loadings plus the base level. As I said, we agree with that, the opposition agrees with that, the union agrees with that and the sectors agree with that, and it needed to be a much more transparent system. We then had to come up with a system that adhered to the recommendations of Professor Teese—one that provided more autonomy and flexibility, and ensured that there was not that vast disparity between schools. Quite frankly, the previous funding could not be justified; we could not in all conscience justify why one school had \$700 000 more than another school. We could not do that because of the complexity of the current funding model, which is flawed. Professor Teese identified that and stated what everybody knew.

As a result of that, I announced the funding model almost a month ago—about three and a half weeks ago—and it has been well received across the board. As a result of the new funding model we have identified that base level of funding for students, as recommended by Professor Teese, and the recommended loadings for those specific areas. What we did in Western Australia was acknowledge the fact that the secondary level of education, as I said, is funded at a much higher level than the primary level of education. We have rebalanced that level of education to the tune of \$45 million over five years. That needs to be kept in perspective; it is over five years. That is at a time when we as a government will be spending \$25 billion on education. All schools will continue to be funded extremely well. Our secondary schools will continue to be funded at a higher level than those in any other state, so our schools will still be funded particularly well. As a result of the new student-centred funding, the money will go where the students are. According to the recommendations of Professor Teese, 529 schools will be better off in that they will get more than they anticipated. There will be 207 schools that will not get as much as they had anticipated. However, almost all schools will get more money because of the fact that the secondary schools will have year 7s as a new cohort of students. So, yes, some secondary schools will get less than they had anticipated. But they will still get increased funding.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned a number of schools. I could list 529 schools that will do a lot better. That includes a vast number of schools in lower socioeconomic areas, particularly primary schools; the vast majority of primary schools will do much better. To give some examples, John Willcock College will not get as much funding as it had anticipated. But it will still get \$2.2 million more next year than it will get this year. Girrawheen Senior High School will get \$450 000 more next year than it will get this year. Belmont City College will get \$1.2 million more next year than it will get this year.

Hon Sue Ellery: And more students!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Fitzroy Valley will get \$250 000 more —

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

Hon Sue Ellery: And more students!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): Order!

Hon PETER COLLIER: I listened to the Leader of the Opposition in silence, but I could quite easily have refuted most of what she said. Gilmour College will get \$800 000 more next year than it will get this year. We need to keep things in perspective. Yes, some schools will not get as much as they had anticipated. But they will still be extremely well resourced. I emphasise that.

The base level of funding for students has never changed. We always need to have a base level of funding for a school to operate at a minimum level. That is what schools will have. On top of that, schools will still have their criteria for the five areas as suggested by Professor Teese, and possibly other program areas as well. So they will still be extremely well resourced.

Having said that, most schools will transition next year. It will not take five years for all schools to transition. Sixty-six per cent of schools will transition after one year; 83 per cent, or over three-quarters of schools, will have transitioned after two years; 92 per cent of schools will have transitioned after three years; and 98 per cent of schools will have transitioned after four years. All schools will have transitioned after five years. We will have a handful of schools that will transition for five years. But the vast majority of schools will have transitioned within two years, and over two-thirds of schools will have transitioned after one year.

We have ensured that we can assist schools in the transitional process. This is exactly what Professor Teese recommended. He recommended a transitional process through to the new funding model, and that is what we have delivered. As a result of that, we have adhered to the recommendations of Professor Teese. Professor Teese in fact did suggest and agrees with the notion of a rebalancing between secondary and primary. He said that the current system requires a major rebalancing of resources, which would result in a partial redistribution of resources across schools. That is exactly what we have done. He said also that this would remove existing unfairness and anomalies. To quote from the ABC website —

Professor Teese said some schools would be hurt by the changes, but he said they were a step in the right direction.

“The rebalancing had to occur if we were to get achievement levels early in primary school and sustain them in secondary school,” he said.

What I am saying is that, yes, there will be some schools, particularly at the secondary level, that will not get as much as they had anticipated. But they will still be extremely well resourced. When we looked at the model that was recommended, which was pure to Professor Teese’s suggestions, I thought, quite frankly, that it was a little too severe for our secondary schools. That is because there would be uniform staged weights. There would be staged weights for kindergarten, for preprimary to year 3, for year 4 to year 6, and for year 7 to year 12. That is what Professor Teese recommended. I said that considering the fact that we are making some significant changes at the secondary level, I would like to have an additional weighting for years 11 and 12. That is why we did not go as hard as was suggested by Professor Teese. I acknowledge that some secondary schools will not be as well off next year as they had anticipated. But I repeat that they will still be the best resourced schools in the nation from any state, and they will still have sufficient resources to enable them to provide a vast array of subject choices. Schools now have 60 Australian Tertiary Admission Rank courses as opposed to 33 ATAR courses 10 years ago, in 2014, and a raft of other non-ATAR and vocational education and training pathways.

We could have adhered to or maintained the status quo. We could have had an inequitable situation and hovered along in mediocrity, where some schools that were similar to other schools were getting vastly disparate funding levels. But we were not prepared to do that. We wanted to put the money where it belongs—that is, to each individual child—and we wanted to adhere to the principles of Teese and make sure that we provided sufficient funding in the early years of education so that as students transfer through to secondary they will be much better prepared to face the special challenges of specialist education at the secondary level of education. It is a bold policy document, and it is a visionary step forward in terms of policy. As a government, I am proud of the fact that we have produced a student-centred funding model that adheres to the recommendations of Professor Teese.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (North Metropolitan) [10.46 am]: I support the motion that is before us. I cannot believe the speed at which the minister has gone through his speech. I think that sometimes the minister tries to bamboozle us in respect of education issues.

I am certainly very concerned, and many of the schools in my region are also very concerned, about the student-centred funding model. The Leader of the Opposition hit the nail on the head when she said that every school has had a cut and that the implementation of the student-centred funding model by this minister has meant that we now have a model that has no safety net and that certainly will disadvantage a wide range of schools and their

communities in this state. I am picking up the fact that there is a lot a discontent among schools and school communities, parents in particular, about the student-centred funding model. The interesting thing about the minister's response is that although some of the comments that he made sound plausible, such as how much funding the government has put into schools, the minister never talked about how much money has been taken out of schools. The minister never, ever talks about what is the real financial position of public schools. We never, ever hear the honest truth from this minister. What we get is an abridged version of what the minister wants us to believe.

Although this funding model is supported in principle by us on this side of the house, there is no doubt that the minister has tinkered with this model. It is this tinkering that is the problem. The minister tinkered in the energy portfolio and caused a great deal of mess in that portfolio, and I am sure that the minister is heading down the same path in relation to this reform. The schools are complaining that they will be worse off to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars because of this new funding model. In particular they are saying that the fact that many schools will lose funding comes on top of the funding that has been withdrawn from schools through a range of commonwealth–state partnership agreements. I was speaking to somebody just the other day who said to me that their primary school was \$300 000 worse off on top of the student-centred funding model arrangement with the state, purely and simply because they were not in receipt of commonwealth funding. Some commonwealth funding had not come through and so they were a further \$300 000 worse off. We never hear anything like that from the minister because he would want us to believe that everything is going very smoothly; but there are a range of issues, and I want to quickly just touch on the fact that it will be harder and harder for schools purely and simply because the commonwealth has moved out of a lot of funding arrangements with the state.

I specifically want to touch on the fact that there was a commonwealth–state agreement on improving numeracy and literacy that ceased on 30 June 2014. That agreement was about ensuring that there was improved student performance in target groups in literacy and/or numeracy in participating schools. It was about effective identification of areas in participating schools where support is needed and improvement had occurred through monitoring and analysis of literacy and numeracy performance; it was also about improving capability and effectiveness of literacy and/or numeracy teaching at participating schools. The program was worth \$242 million, and was suspended on 30 June 2014. For Western Australia, this means that \$23 million in 2013–14—which is the amount that we received under the improving numeracy and literacy commonwealth–state agreement—is now not available to Western Australian schools in order to conduct their literacy and numeracy programs, and this is just one of many. The \$23 million over a four-year period is \$92 million. Clearly, schools will be left without that money being available to them and they will have to fund their own literacy and numeracy programs within existing funding.

In real terms, they will be worse off—in fact, they will be much, much worse off. The minister should actually get up and advise the house how he will find \$92 million over the next four years to substitute for what the commonwealth is not putting into Western Australian schools because quite frankly, schools will be worse off after the loss of \$92 million over the next four years as a result of this agreement collapsing. I have got the figures here. Public schools, Catholic schools and independent schools will also be losing money. We need to know where the minister will find \$92 million.

We will also need to know where he will find the funding, and, again, I have the figures here but I will put them on record at another time, for the money lost due to the finalisation or the completion of the Closing the Gap Indigenous Program. We also need to know from the minister, and I see him brushing his brow, about the school pathways program, which has also collapsed. We need to know where he will find the money to give to schools to make up for what they have lost through the finalisation of that particular commonwealth–state agreement. Also, improving teacher quality; that is a program that has collapsed, and obviously that will need to be funded from internal school resources.

Then there is the early education program. These programs are worth hundreds of millions of dollars. That is hundreds of millions of dollars that was available to all schools through the partnership between commonwealth and state governments that will no longer be available. Quite frankly, we need to have some explanation as to how the government will find the money from the state budget in order to put into Western Australian public schools that loss of funding due to the finalisation of the commonwealth–state agreements.

When the minister gets up here in this place to advise the house about just how well the government is doing, trying to convince us that we do not have a problem about funding because this is a great model and this is how much he has put into the education system, he is really only telling part of the story, and it is factually incorrect. What he does not tell is how much he has actually taken out of the system and how much schools will be worse off as a result of—one, him fiddling with the model for a start; and secondly, how much they will be worse off

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

by the fact that these agreements with the commonwealth have collapsed and there is no alternative funding source.

HON PETER KATSAMBANIS (North Metropolitan) [10.56 am]: I rise today to express my opposition to the motion before us, but I want to thank the mover of the motion for bringing it before the house so we can get another opportunity to, firstly, tell the great news story that is this government's handling of the education portfolio since it came to power in 2008, and also to highlight the philosophical difference in education between people on the government side of the house and people on the opposition side of the house.

Once again today, we see an opposition who comes in here and bleats and moans and throws around buzz words like "cuts" without focusing on the reality that is before us.

Several members interjected.

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Madam Acting President, I have a point of order.

Several members interjected.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I want to take the opportunity of having my say, because members opposite had their say. Let me have mine!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): Hon Peter Katsambanis, there is a point of order!

Hon Peter Katsambanis: Because you don't like the truth!

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I have never had to stand in this position since I have become an acting president and I did not want this to be the first occasion. In case you need reminding, when there is a point of order called and I am in the chair, all members at that time pay attention to what is going on in the chair. There is a point of order.

Hon Peter Katsambanis: I could not hear it.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you, Madam Acting President. The honourable member referred to members of the opposition as bleating. I am offended by that and I ask him to withdraw.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! I will refer it to Hon Peter Katsambanis in that it is his decision—given that there has been an objection taken to the words that he used—whether he chooses to withdraw those comments.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I have—I actually did not hear the point of order and have no actual understanding of what the point is being made by the member. If he cares to repeat it —

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The member has taken offence at the term used; that members of the opposition were bleating.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Which term?

Hon Ken Travers: You should be listening!

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members!

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Just withdraw!

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Which term am I being asked to withdraw, Madam Acting President? I had not heard—I could not hear what term the member was referring to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: He said that the term that you used was that members of the opposition were bleating, and he has taken offence at those —

Several members interjected.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Madam Acting President, I understand the conventions of the house. If the member takes offence at a particular comment, I withdraw any offence that was meant.

Debate Resumed

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. We are not in the habit of naming people in this chamber, but I have had to name two people today. You have constantly interrupted throughout this debate. This debate on a Thursday morning is a good debate and it should continue that way. The call is with Hon Peter Katsambanis who has withdrawn the remark objected to by Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: I understand the sensitivities on the other side because members opposite do not like being exposed publicly for an opposition —

Point of Order

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Madam Acting President, I agree with the comments you made about the time-limited nature of this debate and the importance of members not interjecting. I also recall that on a number of occasions yesterday you called members on this side of the chamber to order for inviting interjections by referring to members on the other side of the chamber, and you gave express instructions to those members that they should not do that. I ask you to do the same with the current member.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): Thank you, Hon Ken Travers. If you recall, yesterday I said that I did not like people using the word “you” when referring to members across the chamber, and that all comments should be directed through the Chair. I also objected to pointing across the chamber, but was not necessarily talking about people in the collective sense.

Debate Resumed

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: Once again, I understand why some people who are philosophically opposed to this government would want to stop us from talking in debates such as this. They do not want us to promote the good news story that this government has delivered for students and parents through education reforms in this state. However, I am proud to stand today and attempt, through all of the interjections and the debating points that want to be taken, to plough on and promote that story, as the minister did in his contribution where he outlined very clearly the strong commitment that this government has made financially and through other practical reforms to the education system to improve education outcomes in this state for school students who utilise the public education system. Members do not need to take it from me that parents and students have welcomed this government’s contribution to the education system. For the first time in generations, and we are the only state in Australia to do so, the move from public to private school education has been reversed in this state. We now see an increase in the percentage of kids who attend public schools. There is a good reason why parents and students are voting with their feet and moving into the public school system in Western Australia: they have increased faith and confidence that that system is delivering the best education for their children.

People on the other side of this debate are far more interested in funding institutions rather than students, and I welcome today’s debate to highlight that very important point. This government’s move to a student-centred funding model has indicated very clearly that we put students and their interests, and their best opportunities in education first and foremost when funding an education system. Yes, we are interested in institutions, and yes we are interested in buildings too, which is why we are funding a record infrastructure spend, but primarily funding will flow with students and their needs. This is what the Gonski report told us federally, and what the Teese report told us here in Western Australia. It told us that the previous model was broken. We did not sit on our hands and twiddle our thumbs and say, “Oh, no, it is broken. What do we do?” Instead, we listened to the experts and this government, led by the Minister for Education—the Leader of the Government in this house, Hon Peter Collier—has implemented the necessary changes to get a better system and a better funding model. Members opposite seem to agree that the old funding model was broken, but they have provided no alternative to the model presented by the government, and there is a reason for that: they do not have an alternative, and I have seen no evidence that an alternative model exists.

The Gonski model is very similar to the model being introduced by this government. The Teese model is very similar again, almost identical, to the model introduced by this government with a few minor differences that the minister highlighted in his contribution, and which I will also highlight for the benefit of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, who talked about the minister tinkering with the model. The minister made it clear where he tinkered with the model in two key respects: the first was to increase the funding for years 11 and 12 students over and above what the model suggests, where the Teese model flatlined the funding to the whole of secondary schooling from year 7, as it will be next year, through to year 12. This minister rightly determined that years 11 and 12 students should get a slight increase on the funding. Parents welcomed that increase, students in years 11 and 12 will welcome that, and, over time, the results will show that that is a good idea. The other main “tinkering”—if members want to call it that—with the model was rather than force all schools to accept the funding model in the first year, transition funding was provided to allow those schools that might receive less money than they had previously anticipated to transition into the new funding model over a period of up to five years where necessary, rather than having to do it on day one. If members opposite want to criticise the minister for providing additional

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

transition funding, they can go ahead and do so. It is logical, sensible, and school communities all around Western Australia will welcome it. As I move around my school communities, I get only positive feedback about this new model that puts students and their needs first, and that makes sure all students in all schools get appropriate and equivalent funding based on their needs or on any other external or internal factors such as a disability, Aboriginality or English as a second language, which is as it should be. There are no losers based on some sort of the historical funding that was provided 30 or 40 years ago that no longer makes sense. The funding moves with the student. It is a fantastic and wonderful idea that is endorsed by education experts all across Australia and internationally, by the former Labor government when it promoted its Gonski model, by Professor Teese, and, increasingly, by parents, students and school communities.

This government should not be criticised for picking up a broken model and trying to fix it. This government should be commended for taking that action, and so should the minister. If members opposite want to highlight individual cases they can, but they do not. They talk about winners and losers. Let me tell members who will be the real winners out of this system: the winners will not be the schools, and the losers will not be the schools. The winners out of this system will be the students being educated in our education system, and the losers will be the people who look to blame and attack this government and pull it down politically for actually doing the right thing. I am happy for those people to be the losers because they do not have the best interests of the students of Western Australia at heart.

I could talk a lot about education because it is a passion of mine. As I have expressed before, every child in every school in Western Australia should get the best opportunity to maximise their personal potential through high-quality education, no matter where they live or which school they attend, whether it be a public or a private school in a metropolitan, regional or remote area. For the first time in living memory this new funding model will allow those students, wherever they are, in whichever school they attend in any part of this state, to maximise their potential, which is why I welcome the funding model and oppose the motion before the house.

Point of Order

Hon HELEN MORTON: I refer to the Acting President's previous ruling on the withdrawal of offensive words. I have looked into the handbook about offensive words or imputations and unparliamentary language. I was unclear whether the word was offensive because it was used against either house or any member, was considered highly disorderly, or was unparliamentary language. I went on the internet and had a look at what "bleating" actually means. The dictionary tells me that it means to complain, moan, mutter, grumble, grouse —

Hon Ken Travers: That is not a point of order; it is a statement from the minister. This is a stunt.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): Order! One of the first things we all learn when we go to an educational institution is that we use our indoor voices and not our outdoor voices. Could we perhaps practise some of that today around this chamber? Thank you.

I will actually say to the minister that I do not think there is a point of order. Although under standing order 46 there is a provision for unparliamentary language, I did not actually direct the member to withdraw those comments. I invited him, in the spirit of getting on with the debate and allowing things to continue. He chose to take up my invitation to withdraw those remarks, so it was not actually a direction under standing orders that I made that ruling. Perhaps we can just move on with the debate.

Hon HELEN MORTON: That is very generous.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Debate Resumed

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural) [11.12 am]: Another three minutes has been taken off the time allowed for this very important debate. Thank you very much, minister, for wasting our time. I have not got long either, and I have sat in silence today, so I hope that that same courtesy will be extended to me.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! The other thing we learn at school is that we listen to the teacher. When I am sitting in this chair, I am like the teacher. Less than three minutes ago I said that we would use indoor voices today. Let us all practice that.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Madam Acting President. I only have 10 minutes, and I have sat in silence today, so I hope that respect will be offered to me as well.

This is a very good motion, and well put by the Leader of the Opposition, and of course I will support it. I am not sure whether Hon Peter Katsambanis has actually read the motion, but if he does he will realise that it states that

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

this house calls on the government to recognise the impacts of its cuts to school funding in 2014. For those members opposite who are not sure, that is this year. Cuts were made to schools this year, and further cuts are proposed to 30 per cent of schools in 2015. That is what the motion refers to. I think members opposite may not have read the motion, and I urge that they take a look at it. That is what I intend to talk about today, and hopefully it will add to the fullness of the debate.

In 2014, as has been pointed out several times by members on this side, and certainly by me as it affected my electorate, significant cuts were made to schools right across the state of Western Australia. These cuts were quite well documented, and quite well accepted. Despite the assurances of Hon Peter Katsambanis, they were not accepted in a happy way by any schools. Schools were in shock, and P&Cs were frustrated. Many schools had to go without things such as teachers' aides, and they lost a lot of their discretionary funding. Things like school camps came under threat, and P&Cs had to fundraise even harder to try to overcome some of these cuts. Truancy officers were lost from schools in my electorate.

There were some significant funding cuts to schools in the Agricultural Region. For instance, John Willcock College had a funding cut of \$270 840 or thereabouts in 2014. We are recognising today the impact of the cuts to those schools, and they were significant. I also refer to Rangeway Primary School. I will stand corrected, but I am of the view that Rangeway Primary School is very low on the list, if not down the very bottom of the list in terms of its socioeconomic index. I believe it is the lowest; its socioeconomic index score was in the order of 77. The school had a cut of \$153 415. I would have thought that that school would have benefited from extra funding, not the loss of teachers' aides, truancy officers and people working with Aboriginal children in that school environment. I know the principal of Rangeway and she is a fantastic operator, but they always find it difficult, like anyone else, when there are funding cuts. We are recognising the impacts of those cuts today in this motion, for those who are not aware. The other school of importance to me is the largest secondary institution in the Agricultural Region—Geraldton Senior College. It has had a cut of \$316 590.

Those were the cuts made in 2014. We calculated that in Geraldton over \$1 million was cut from schools across the board for 2014, and of course that had a significant impact on the operation of those schools. Hon Peter Katsambanis probably needs to go to a few more schools if he has not seen the impacts of those cuts. They are there for all to see, and principals and P&C presidents will tell of their frustration at some of the cuts they have received. I distributed some information to electors in the Agricultural Region and got an enormous response. Northam Primary School lost \$127 185. Northam Senior High School lost \$244 305. I will talk about Northam Senior High School a bit later. Avonvale Primary School—also a school that I would, at very best, say had a very challenging environment—lost over \$54 000. Toodyay District High School lost over \$113 000. That is in this current year—2014. That is what these schools are going without this year. I am acknowledging the impact that that has had on those high schools. York District High School, which does not have a lot of students, lost \$157 320. The cuts had a significant impact.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, we all support a review of school funding models. That should be done as a matter of course by governments, I would suggest, every 10 years. Funding models should be looked at to see what is working and what is not, and to see how the system can be made better. After all, that is what we are elected into government to do. I would have thought that that was standard fare for a Minister for Education. It would not be discipline thing; it is just something that would naturally be done. We have calculated that in 2014, more than \$11 million has been ripped out of schools in the Agricultural Region under the cuts announced last year. I have invited people to get in touch with my office about these cuts, and I have had a significant response, mainly from parents and concerned citizens, not necessarily from staff, who probably do not want to speak out against their employer, and I fully understand that. The State School Teachers' Union of WA has had a lot to say, as has the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA, and other organisations that represent workers in the schools. Many of the cleaners and teachers' aides have also been affected, so United Voice has been very vocal on behalf of its members, as it should be, against these cuts made to schools in 2014, right across the state, including in the Agricultural Region, and including some schools that have challenging environments or low socioeconomic indexes and do not have great graduation rates to universities. That is the first part of the motion. For any subsequent speakers I make that point very clear. No schools were exempted from those cuts.

We support the notion of having a funding review. Professor Teese is a distinguished person in his field. I think the words he used were "shifting the balance", which I think is a good idea, to put more money into early childhood years. That is very important. If we can engage children earlier, we can fill in the gaps, whether in literacy or numeracy, before they start school, so they can begin school on a more level playing field with everybody else. That is a good notion.

I note that Rebecca Carmody tweeted, the day before school went back in term 3, that Professor Teese was starting to distance himself from these changes. There was quite a lot of media interest, which I do not have time

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

to go into but Hon Sue Ellery pointed out, in that story. Professor Teese did not agree with bringing the new model in on top of cuts, and taking money out of high schools; they were his initial comments.

Hon Peter Collier: Yes, he did.

Hon DARREN WEST: Minister, I know we agree to disagree on this, but it is on the public record.

Hon Peter Collier: Which public record?

Hon DARREN WEST: Minister, it was reported quite widely in the media.

Hon Peter Collier: Where?

Hon Sue Ellery: I read them all out.

Hon DARREN WEST: Yes, Hon Sue Ellery read them out. I do not have long.

There was considerable media reporting on this funding model, and then Professor Teese sort of did, I think, generally fall back into line for reasons about which I can only speculate.

I have less than a minute and a half. On top of those cuts I just pointed out, half of the \$40 million allocated for district high school upgrades was pulled; that was a broken promise. Many of those schools were in my electorate: Gingin District High School, \$3 million; Boddington District High School; and York District High School copped it again. It was promised \$151 00, but it will now not get that. Toodyay District High School is another one I mentioned earlier that is now not getting its funding. Jurien Bay District High School also had \$1 million pulled out; and Wyndham, which I think Hon Sue Ellery mentioned, missed out there as well.

I turn now to the cuts to the schools that will happen as a result of the new funding model. As I pointed out, Rangeway is a very challenging environment; it is a very low socioeconomic area with a low socioeconomic index. When we plug figures into a new model that spits out that that school will have a \$22 000 loss, despite the fact that we are supposed to be shifting money into primary schools from high schools, I would have thought that we would probably stand back and say, “We’d better run these figures again and change a few things.” That is what the second part of this motion is asking for. It asks that the government revisit the further proposed cuts to 30 per cent of schools in 2015. Many of those schools are in my electorate, and I will briefly read through them in the few seconds I have: Boddington District High School; Bruce Rock District High School; Carnamah District High School; Central Midlands Senior High School; Corrigin District High School; Dongara District High School; Geraldton Senior College; Gingin District High School; John Willcock College; Jurien Bay District High School; Kalbarri District High School; Katanning Senior High School; Kojonup District High School; Kulin District High School; Merredin College; Morawa District High School; Mount Barker Community College; Narembeen District High School; Narrogin Senior High School; Northam Senior High School; Northampton District High School; Quairading District High School; Toodyay District High School; Wagin District High School; Wongan Hills District High School; Wyalkatchem District High School; and, York District High School. Members have heard some of those names before. We are concerned about the further proposed cuts, and we would ask that the minister revisit the cuts to these schools.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Liz Behjat): I note that Hon Ken Travers has just given an apple to the teacher, but might I remind him that under standing orders, food is not allowed in the chamber! Hon Col Holt has the call.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.22 am]: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this motion to the house, and I thank the Minister for Education for his contribution. I think it is a really good debate to have, and it reflects the concerns of everybody about one of the major service delivery areas of a government into our communities. I think it is good for us to reflect the views of our communities in this place.

Regional Western Australia is as concerned as any school community around the state. I think that concern may be magnified a little in our communities because we have limited choices if we think the education on offer to our children in the schools in our communities is not up to what we expect. We have limited opportunities to do something about it. Those in a city environment or in the larger regional towns have the option of private school and other education providers, but many of our communities have no such choice. We need to consistently and constantly think about how we can improve the educational outcomes for those people. Hon Darren West made a very good point in his contribution—when he got to the point—around reform, review and looking at how we do things differently. He suggested that should be done every 10 years, and I agree. I think we need to consistently look at how we do things. I think this reform is about trying to improve educational outcomes for all students across the state, including regional Western Australia. Any reform process has its challenges; not everyone will agree with the outcomes or the way things are done, but that is why we have these debates, why government

implements its reforms, why the opposition argues against them, and why other parties try to bring about the best outcome for the people they represent.

I think the result of this reform will show that some really good decisions have been made. We already know that in regional Western Australia some of the real critical points around improving educational outcomes for our kids are around early intervention. There needs to be more resources and funding, but with more focus on working with the students at an earlier age to make sure that when they get to secondary and tertiary education they are better prepared. We know that in measurements of education, our regional kids fall behind. We also know that university acceptances for regional kids are down. We know there is an issue and a problem, but will doing the same thing over and over again improve those outcomes? Probably not. We have to have reform and we welcome it because we want to fix those issues so that regional kids have the same educational outcomes opportunities as city kids.

A critical point, based on feedback from people in regional areas, is that the quality of teachers is incredibly important. The teachers in Western Australia had a wage increase, and if they are not the best-paid in the nation, they are probably close to.

Hon Peter Collier: They are the best paid.

Hon COL HOLT: They are the best? Thank you.

We have recognised the value teachers have to our communities by saying, “You are important, and here is the reward for it.” I think we have some unique challenges in regional Western Australia, and I have spoken to the Minister for Education about this and put it on record in this place. We need those great teachers out in the bush as well. If we are going to have our children rock up to school a little bit late in terms of their educational development, we need really good teachers to work with them to push them through to the end of their school life so that when the opportunities come up for higher education or entering the workforce, they have as much chance as anybody else.

During this reform process we are asking the Minister for Education to be absolutely vigilant about what it will mean for regional education. I think we all recognise that more money is not necessarily the best answer. More money might mean we can build a new classroom, but I have to tell the minister that we do not need new classrooms in some of our schools; we need a new approach to education. I think one of the great advantages of the reform will be the one-line budget item for principals to be able to respond to the unique circumstances within their school. That will be a huge advantage to them. I think it comes with the rider, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned in her contribution, that we have to make sure they are absolutely equipped to make the most of that opportunity. We need to make sure we have principals who are good decision-makers and can make the most of that opportunity by saying, “Actually, we don’t need a new classroom; what we really need is an education support system”, or e-learning system or whatever it might be. They can make decisions at their own local level to meet their own needs. I think in regional Western Australia, where there is a great deal of diversity in what our schools do in the communities they operate in, that is more critical than ever. I think a challenge for the minister and the Department of Education will be making sure that the decision-makers at the schools make the most of those opportunities. I know that started with the rollout of the independent public schools system, but this is taking it one step further. We have to make absolutely sure that we have good people making decisions on behalf of our kids regionally and anywhere in Western Australia.

I also want to flag a concern. I have talked a little about refocusing funding to the early years in the primary schools, which I think is absolutely the right thing to do. But I take on Hon Darren West’s point that some of our district high schools have probably suffered as a result of that refocusing of funding into primary schools. I will be watching carefully—as I am sure my colleagues in any regional setting do—to see the effect that has on district high schools and their educational outcomes. I understand that when making reforms we might not get it right in the first instance; however, we need to ensure that if we are getting it wrong and we have not reached the outcomes we are looking for, we have a system that makes sure we adjust quickly enough and students are not left behind. There are lots of district high schools in regional Western Australia, and in relative terms most of them are losing funds. I do not know the exact reasons for that. It might have to do with student numbers and changes in circumstances, but there are plenty of reasons.

Hon Peter Collier: Sweetheart deals—you can’t really explain it. There are sweetheart deals that have evolved over decades.

Hon COL HOLT: Hon Peter Collier is right. There has been some disparity in the past and we are trying to get some equality back, but that does not excuse the fact that they are going to lose some funds. Schools have to learn to operate in a new way and we have to make sure that when this is fully implemented that we work with those high schools and the district high schools that I am most concerned about to ensure that they still manage to deliver good educational outcomes in the new reform process. Have no doubt, members, government

Extract from *Hansard*

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p5253c-5265a

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Peter Katsambanis; Hon Stephen Dawson;
Acting President; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Darren West; Hon Col Holt

members will not be bleating about the changes in terms of the causes and effects on our communities, but they will be working hard to make sure that they use their influence in government to fix those issues.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.