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Enquiries : **D20/0441557**

Ms Janine Freeman MLA
Chair
Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee
Parliament of Western Australia

Email: laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms Freeman

On Wednesday, 12 August 2020, the Department of Education attended the follow-up hearing conducted by the Education and Health Standing Committee to the inquiry into Digital Innovation in Secondary Education with a particular focus on digital technology in education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Educational Computing Association of Western Australia (ECAWA) was also invited to give evidence at the hearing in respect of the challenges in shifting to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. ECAWA's draft transcript has been reviewed and I would like to bring to your attention some clarification about some of the statements and correction of a few inaccuracies in the information provided in respect of the Department's activities during COVID-19.

1. **Hard copy packs for students:** *On page 3 of the transcript and again on page 8, it is stated that only 20 hard copy packs were picked up for Ellenbrook Secondary College students, of which (page 8) 1 500 packs had been printed.*

I am advised by the school that approximately 260 mainstream student packs and 32 Education Support Unit packs (each student pack could include 6-12 individual subject packs for three weeks) were produced. A pack for each student who indicated they needed one was prepared, copied and collated by education assistants who cross-referenced individual student timetables. Of these packs, only approximately 40 were not collected and some extras were requested on an ad hoc basis.

2. **Delivery of online learning:** *On page 8 it is suggested that leadership teams within schools were not given solid direction. To support school leaders, the Department produced – at the end of March 2020 – a School Planning Framework resource encouraging school leaders to adopt a 'whole school approach' to distance learning. The framework was based on the understanding that each school's response to distance learning would be unique, based on its context and understanding of local communities' needs. The framework was designed to ensure that students would at all times be placed at the centre of decision-making and it established clear expectations for all staff to align school capacity and community needs in the move to a model of distance learning.*
3. **Access to laptops:** *Commentary about the lending of laptops to students on page 4 would benefit from the Committee being made aware of additional information provided by Ellenbrook Secondary College about the process it undertook to identify whether any of its students required assistance with ICT access and capacity.*

- The school advises its Student Services Team spent two weeks toward the end of Term 1 calling families to determine their ICT access and capacity. The Team was able to contact fewer than half of the families; of these, approximately 105 families indicated that they did not have access and this figure was then extrapolated to 250 families without access. The school loaned 98 laptops in total (60 to Year 11 and 38 to Year 12 students). Every student who requested a laptop was provided with one.

4. **Learning at Home website:** *The response to a question about the Learning at Home website on page 8 elicited a statement that the website was not capable of providing the kinds of direction parents needed and that many websites were used to obtain resources.*

The Learning at Home website was initially launched on 23 March 2020 to support parents and students. K-Year 12 learning content was added to the website, including 697 learning resources, wellbeing advice and other resources to support learning at home. There were 1 180 756 unique page views over the period from 23 March to 15 July 2020. A parent helpline was established on 20 April 2020 and advertised on the website to assist parents with technical support including downloading of content, Connect platform use and printing.

5. **Monitoring students:** *Discussion on pages 7 and 8 was about how teachers communicated with students and monitored how they were learning. A statement was made that “teachers did not have enough skills... kids did not have computers. A lot of the students – 80% ... actually did no work for a period of four weeks”.*

Ellenbrook Secondary College advises that, during Weeks 8 to 10 of Term 1, the College made regular contact with families via Connect and Academy (at least twice per week). During the first three weeks of Term 2, the majority of students physically attended school and teachers taught their classes face-to-face. Students learning at home were supported through Connect and email. The College’s attendance officer made weekly contact with families of students who were learning at home and those whose attendance did not improve were followed up and home visits conducted. Three families were referred to the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health and one family enrolled at the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). The school refutes the claim that “80%” of the students “actually did no work for a period of 4 weeks.”

6. **Attendance data:** *On page 9 of the transcript, attendance rates at Ellenbrook Secondary College and Ashdale Secondary College are quoted as having been 85% and 45% respectively. Each school has confirmed the following figures:*
- Ellenbrook Secondary College –55%; and
 - Ashdale Secondary College – 64%.

The Department would welcome the opportunity for this clarifying information to be associated with the ECAWA transcript. Alternatively, if the Committee would like to ask the Department some additional questions to clarify points of discussion, we would be pleased to respond.

Yours sincerely



Lisa Rodgers
Director General

11 SEP 2020