



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Education**

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Ms J M Freeman MLA
Chair
Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee

Email: laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms Freeman

Thank you for your letter dated 17 August 2020 providing for review the transcript of evidence for the Education and Health Standing Committee's hearing into the role of digital technology during pandemic conditions and additional questions that arose at the 12 August hearing.

Please find attached the transcript with suggested tracked changes. In addition to these, we request a correction the name of a school to which you referred in connection with the loan of laptops to students. The school in question should have been Balga Senior High School, not 'Belmont' (refer top of page 4).

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Rodgers'.

Lisa Rodgers
Director General

Atts.

8 SEP 2020

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

HEARING INTO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY DURING PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

Please provide the Department of Education's response for the Committee on the following:

Hearing Questions

1. Some teachers expressed concern at having to teach using multiple modes simultaneously (i.e. online and face-to-face). Is this something they should expect to do, in order to maintain flexibility for students, and if so how could it be made easier for teachers to manage?

Answer

No teachers were required to teach using multiple modes simultaneously.

From Wednesday, 29 April 2020, schools were open for all children to return to school and be taught a face-to-face program and timetable. For those students who chose to learn at home, distance education packages and resources were provided. Where schools could provide online teaching and support for students at home, this was implemented. All students were provided with the support to continue to learn, and schools determined how this would work in their individual contexts.

Schools were advised on 27 April that teachers were not required to deliver to students both at school and at home simultaneously. From Wednesday 29 April, for those students at home, distance education packages or online resources were provided. School leaders managed curriculum delivery in consultation with teaching staff. Where schools could provide online support and teaching for students at home, this was implemented. Where necessary, schools could hire additional casual and relief teachers to support students learning at home. Schools maintained regular contact with students and families to ensure students remained connected to their schools. Supervision of children learning at home was the responsibility of parents or carers. Students who attended school were taught a face-to-face program and timetable.

When teachers delivered teaching and learning online, they could access resources and support through:

- the *Connected Learning Hub*, which provides online curriculum resources and support to deliver online learning;
- a curriculum support email address and phone line to assist with accessing online learning resources;
- a self-paced professional development course developed to prepare teachers for distance learning;
- practical training and guidance on different technology platforms provided by the Department and the 'how-to' of teaching online; and
- Connect, the Department's learning management system, which provides a safe and secure interactive platform to share information and resources.

2. We understand schools conducted audits of laptops and other devices that could be loaned to students, and that schools that needed more were able to borrow from other schools. Are you able to determine or estimate how many WA public school secondary students were still without access to a computer or other device (e.g. iPad) during the shutdown, once laptops for loan had been distributed?

Answer

No public schools in Western Australia shut down.

The Department was prepared for a large volume of applications, but the “soft opening” at the beginning of Term 2 and subsequent return to compulsory attendance in Week 4 meant that schools needed less help than expected. In total, only 12 applications were received, distributing to schools a total of 21 laptops and 55 wireless dongles. This would indicate that the supply of devices was sufficient. The Department’s COVID management team is not aware of any schools that had secondary students who were without access to a computer or other device.

In Term 3 annually, the Department undertakes an audit in the form of a computer census to ascertain the number, age and type of devices owned by the system. From the 2019 audit, we could build a picture of how many devices each school had and whether this would provide a sufficient level of access for students.

During the response period, in the first instance schools were asked to lend any school-owned devices to students who needed them to access online learning at home, with the reassurance that the Department would reimburse the cost of repair or replacement if a school device was damaged or lost. Any schools that did not have enough devices to cater for their students’ educational needs could apply for more, which the Department filled from a central supply of devices that then became school property available for loan to students. A small number of parents and carers also contacted the Department directly for assistance but were asked to speak to their school in the first instance. The school could then organise a loan of an existing device or submit an application if a device was not available.

3. Do you know how many secondary students have needed (or will need) assistance to catch up as a result of missing lessons during the shutdown, and is there a strategy in place to ensure they are assisted?

Answer

No public schools in Western Australia shut down.

Western Australian public schools were open for all parents and carers who chose to send their children to school from the start of Term 2 on 29 April 2020, and Year 11 and 12 students were strongly encouraged to attend. From 18 May 2020 (Week 4 of Term 2), it was compulsory for all students to attend school.

Due to cancellations of excursions, camps and study trips, this cohort of students, including Year 12, have had more time in the classroom than previous years. Schools are managing the educational needs of students at a local level. Any student requiring assistance is identified by their school and supported on a case-by-case basis, depending on the identified need or curriculum. Information regarding the number of individual students who may have sought or may require such assistance is not kept centrally.

The School Curriculum and Standards Authority has provided accommodations to schools for 2020 to ensure equity and fairness for all students enrolled in Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) courses. Western Australia's schools remained open and continued to provide teaching and learning programs to students regardless of whether they were at home or face-to-face in classrooms, learning online or through hard-copy work packages. The Authority advises that the Year 11 and 12 course content and assessment requirements for 2020 can be achieved. ATAR exams will go ahead in November 2020 and every student will be eligible to obtain a WACE and an ATAR so they can go on to further study, training or employment next year.

As has always been the case, in exceptional circumstances that are out of the control of either the school or the student, the Authority's WACE Requirements Special Considerations Committee will consider requests for waiving the WACE requirements.

4. Do you know if there are any students who have not returned to secondary school following the shutdown, despite the Department putting in place systems to support students at risk of disengaging?

Answer

Again, public schools did not close in Western Australia; they did not shut down

Between 18 May and 20 August 2020, 91 enrolled secondary school students did not attend school. During the same period in 2019, this figure was 78 secondary school students. Information is not available centrally to determine whether COVID-19 was associated with 2020 disengagement.

Funding to the equivalent of 36 FTE was provided to employ additional staff to help students who need additional support to re-engage with their school. Support was suited to local needs and contexts, and included:

- additional hours/days for Aboriginal and Islander education officers to undertake family visits and liaison;
- the appointment of a short-term attendance officer;
- extending social worker contracts;
- teacher relief for follow-up engagement with targeted students and families, and to support case-management processes;
- a participation coordinator working across a small network of schools to visit identified families to re-engage students;
- additional chaplaincy and psychologist support;
- youth officer to support student services in case management of identified students;
- youth worker to provide mental health support; and
- education assistant FTE to provide direct in-class support for a target group of students.

Some schools used the funding allocated for specific re-engagement strategies rather than additional FTE. For example, Swan View Primary School received \$5 000 and has worked collaboratively with Swan View Senior High School on a case-management approach for identified students. The school has used some of its funding for costs associated with running a bus to support home pick-ups.

Students whose health was compromised were provided with education online through their school, or via remote learning through the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental, the School of Isolated and Distance Education or Schools of the Air.

5. A report from the Grattan Institute cautions against rapidly expanding the use of digital tools in the next six months, saying there is still little information on which ones are most valuable. Have the last few months provided a better sense of what is most useful to secondary students, teachers and schools (e.g. online tutoring programs, literacy and numeracy programs etc?)

Answer

Schools made local decisions regarding the use of digital tools to manage teaching and learning through COVID-19 restrictions. Anecdotal feedback suggests that, for many schools, there has been an increase in the use of familiar tools rather than new tools. Replacing face-to-face classroom teaching with technology has required teachers to develop new skillsets. Schools recognise that whole-school approaches to the consistent and effective use of familiar tools would reduce the impact on teachers and enable a faster transition to remote learning.

The most used digital tools provided flexible communication and collaboration opportunities – teacher-to-student, teacher-to-parent and student-to-student. In many cases, it was not one particular tool but a small combination of tools that enabled teachers to not only deliver learning but also maintain the relationships necessary to support student wellbeing.

Feedback from many secondary schools described the use of:

- web-conferencing tools such as WebEx or Zoom for real-time lesson delivery;
- systems such as Microsoft 365, Google Suite for Education or Connect for information and collaboration; and
- learning management systems such as Connect or Seqta for lesson materials, submission of work and access to teacher feedback.

In addition, many secondary schools utilised subject-specific tools to supplement learning. Many of these provided elements of adaptive learning and online tutoring, including self-paced video tutorials, self-marking revision and practice activities, problem-solving and gamified content, and e-book support materials.

Although the use of some digital tools has reduced as students have returned to face-to-face classrooms, some systems have remained more highly used than pre-COVID-19, suggesting teachers and students have found value in the continued use of these tools for content sharing, online collaboration and learning management.

Professional learning on the use of the Department’s online services, such as Connect and Microsoft 365, is being refocused to help teachers implement blended models of learning that can build on what they have learned during COVID-19 to make more effective use of online learning opportunities to supplement face-to-face teaching.

Online learning has the potential to provide a ‘bridge’ between school and home, and to strengthen learning partnerships between teachers, students and parents.