

Local area education planning and the reform of secondary education in Western Australia

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Abstract

The Department of Education and Training in Western Australia has developed a Local Area Education Planning Process involving groups of schools and the wider community. The purpose of the process is to plan for improved provision of education across the years of schooling from Kindergarten to Year 12.

The established criteria determine improved access to a better range of curriculum choices, specialist programs and quality facilities. Strong partnerships with Universities, the business community and the Training Sector are evolving as communities seek to provide flexible pathways to enable students to move confidently into the changing world of the twenty-first century. Innovative, sustainable, and flexible programs that are unique to each local area have developed across the State.

This paper focuses on the challenges of providing secondary education across a vast area and the creative models that have emerged from this process are discussed.

Keywords: Reform in Secondary Education, Local Area Education Planning, Change Management in Secondary Education, State Education Planning.

Presentation format: paper, overhead projector.

Background

The state of Western Australia is the largest in area of all of Australia's States and Territories. It spans some 2500 kilometres from north to south and has a population of approximately two million people, seventy per cent of whom live in the metropolitan area.

Provision of education to the most remote communities and isolated families is guaranteed.

The community in Western Australia accepts, and in fact, demands that in the compulsory years of schooling children should be able to access education at the local level, a commitment that provides a major challenge both in terms of delivery and resourcing. This provision has been enshrined in the *School Education Act 1999*.

SCHOOL EDUCATION ACT 1999

Part 1 -

5. Definition of “pre-compulsory education period”

The pre-compulsory education period for a child is as follows:

- (c) from 1 January 2003 -
 - (i) from the beginning of the year in which the child reaches the age of 4 years and 6 months; and
 - (ii) until the end of the year in which the child reaches the age of 5 years and 6 months.

6. Definition of “compulsory education period”

The compulsory education period for a child is as follows:

- (b) from 1 January 2003 until 31 December 2011 –
 - (i) from the beginning of the year in which the child reaches the age of 6 years and 6 months; and
 - (ii) until the end of the year in which the child reaches the age of 15; and
- (c) from 1 January 2012 –
 - (i) from the beginning of the year in which the child reaches the age of 6 years and 6 months; and
 - (ii) until the end of the year in which the child reaches the age of 15 years and 6 months.

Schools in Western Australia have traditionally comprised of:

- Primary Schools, catering for Kindergarten/Pre-primary to Year 7 (age 12 Years);
- District High Schools, typically incorporating Kindergarten/Pre-primary through to Year 10 (age 15 years) and in some cases Year 12 (age 17 years). Most of these schools are located in rural areas. However, recently the Department is establishing this model of schooling in the metropolitan area.;
- Comprehensive Senior High Schools, catering for Year 8 (age 13 years) to Year 12 students;
- High Schools for years 8-10;
- Individual programs for isolated students provided by the School of Isolated and Distance Education;
- Special schools for students with intellectual and/or physical disabilities; and
- Schools in remote locations providing for students living in aboriginal communities.

Table 1: Types and number of schools in Western Australia, 1980

	OTHER	METRO	RURAL	TOTAL
Senior High Schools		46	22	68
High Schools		5	4	9
District High Schools			53	53
Primary Schools		260	242	502
Special Aboriginal Schools			22	22
Special Schools		17	10	27
School of Isolated and Distance Education	1			1
	1	328	353	682

This structure of schooling for the Department of Education and Training's 682 Schools remained quite constant over the years. Even though the inner city secondary schools were experiencing a large fall in numbers, reform was slow. Secondary schooling continued to be delivered through the Comprehensive High School structure catering for Years 8-12 or through the District High School K-10 structure.

Changes in Secondary Education Provision

It was not until 1981 that a decision was taken by the Government of the day to close two metropolitan Senior High Schools, Tuart Hill and Bentley, now known as Tuart and Canning Senior Colleges.

The Senior Colleges were established to address two identified needs:

- The needs of "second chance" mature age tertiary bound students who were accommodated with difficulty in technical colleges; and
- The needs of the other group of "second chance" students who wished to upgrade their high school qualification, to improve their standards in basic skills or to undertake transition to work-studies.

In establishing the Colleges the Department envisaged a new kind of educational institution that was intended to provide an innovative alternative to the traditional secondary school for students above the age of compulsory schooling. Hence, a high degree of flexibility was encouraged in terms of teaching approaches and structure. Each individual Senior College was allowed considerable freedom to implement initiatives that met the needs of their local community and accommodated the diverse needs of these students.

It took another 10 years before a Senior Campus (Cyril Jackson), designed for Year 11 and 12 students was created in the eastern corridor and then one other later (North Lake) in 1995 in the southern corridor. Whilst the decision was driven by the fall in numbers in these schools an educational rationale was gaining momentum, recognising that some young adults appeared to thrive in an environment that fostered responsibility and independence yet at the same time provided pastoral care and structure. However, the two campuses were greatly constrained by the physical environment that had been designed as a traditional comprehensive high school decades ago.

Influence of Research

In the meantime international research was emerging through the school reform agenda (Beane, 1991, 1993; Eyers, Cormack and Barratt, 1993; Hargreaves and Earl, 1990; Hargreaves and Fullan, 1991; Hill, Holmes-Smith and Rowe, 1993; Lee, Dedrick and Smith, 1991; Schools Council Canberra, 1993) about the particular needs of young adolescents. Best summarised by Hargreaves and Earl (1990:26) they felt that recognition needed to be given to the main characteristics and needs of adolescents as at this time of their development they were required to:

- adjust to profound physical, intellectual, social and emotional changes;
- develop a positive self concept;
- experience and grow towards independence;
- develop a sense of identify and of personal and social values;
- experience social acceptance, affiliation, and affection among peers of the same and opposite sex;
- increase their awareness of, ability to cope with, and capacity to respond constructively to the social and political world around them; and
- establish relationships with particular adults within which these processes of growth can take place.

The 1993 Schools Council Report, *In the Middle: schooling for young adolescents* and the research conducted through the longitudinal study of school and teacher effectiveness in Victoria, known as the Victorian Quality Schools Project (Hill, Holmes-Smith and Rowe, 1993; Hill and Rowe, 1996, 1998; Rowe, Hill and Holmes-Smith, 1994, 1995) strongly influenced educators in Western Australia.

Peter Hill, who led the Victorian Quality Schools Project, conducted a number of key forums in his home state of Western Australia. His credibility and evidence-based proposals captivated the imagination of teachers and principals and greatly assisted in the take-up of this reform agenda in the middle years of schooling in this state.

For the first time both state and public education systems publicly acknowledged the need for schools to link the needs and concerns of young adolescents more closely with appropriate reform in upper-primary and lower secondary schooling and emphasised the importance of relationships not only with peers but with significant adults.

It was this educational agenda along with serious development of outcomes based education in this State that then influenced the design of the two new proposed high schools in Western Australia, Ballajura Community College and Warnbro Community High School.

Private consultants were contracted to design these schools. Their brief included:

- a commitment to community consultation;
- a focus on technology and the provision of the required infrastructure to support teaching, learning, communication and administration; and
- a reflection of the learning community and a team approach in the design of spaces.

The pedagogical approaches being developed to address the emerging needs of adolescents strongly influenced the design and resulted in two schools that physically looked very different from any other previous design.

In addition, for the first time in the history of the Department all of the staff was selected through a local merit selection process, designed to match the staff to the vision and philosophy of the school and its local community.

In 1996 the first attempt was made by the Department of Education to review the provision of education in a local area, Geraldton which is a major regional centre. The two comprehensive Senior High Schools joined to consider what models might be best to suit future educational needs in the area. Although a decision was made to amalgamate the two schools and create a Senior College on one site and a Middle School on the other the process was extremely difficult, protracted, alienating and divisive. Serious reflection by the Department resulted in a unit being established to analyse and develop a more appropriate process that would engage communities in the reform agenda, particularly in secondary education.

Local Area Education Planning

In 1997, the Department developed a policy known as Local Area Education Planning Policy (LAEP). The principles of this planning process strive to maximise the opportunities for local communities to participate in the planning for the provision of education for their local area. Prior to this, as reported by Coffey (1998) there had been scant opportunity for communities to provide meaningful input into the planning of future educational provision.

The objective of Local Area Education Planning was to improve educational opportunities for students by considering schools in groups, and developing forms of organisation that increase access to the curriculum in quality facilities. Schools and in particular, secondary schools, were often competing against each other for students and resources and offered competing rather than complementary specialist programs. This competitive approach only served to further encourage the drift of students to the private sector.

The process forced schools to come together to plan and to develop a vision for the future for their local area, with strong input from key stakeholders in the community. It provided opportunities to examine options beyond the scope of planning at the school level.

In the first instance a draft plan was to be developed, it was then put forward for public consultation and finally after a Ministerial decision was made the plan was then implemented. Of critical importance was that the process focused on clusters of schools working together and planning together to achieve the best delivery of education across a broader local area. This provided the opportunity for local responses to local needs rather than the generic structure of schools which had characterised the Western Australian state education system.

At the same time the *Draft Curriculum Framework* (1997) being developed and was launched in July 1998 after a comprehensive review of curriculum across the state in both private and public schools. This K-12 Framework sets out the learning outcomes which describe what students should know, understand, value and be able to do as a result of their learning in schools. For the first time in Western Australia a common set of learning outcomes was in place for all students, giving teachers increased flexibility to choose the teaching approaches and learning opportunities that work best for individual students in their particular and unique locations.

The implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* (1998) encouraged teachers and schools to explore and develop a range of teaching and learning programs to suit the needs of their students. This naturally led to a questioning of the traditional school organisational structures

that were proving to be barriers to a more enriching, innovative and personalised program for students.

Running parallel to both of these processes was research commissioned by the Government of the day, in 1997, that was to examine Middle Schooling and its implications for the Western Australian schooling system.

The purpose of the research was to provide a planning and renewal framework for schools and communities investigating educational change. The framework aimed to provide information to enable communities, schools and educators to form their own judgements about the applicability of Middle Schooling to Western Australia and to identify the planning issues that would have to be resolved in the establishment of Middle Schools and Middle Schooling.

Further pressure was placed on the secondary sector by the serious expansion of Vocational Education and Training in schools. Take-up of these resource-intensive courses was dramatic and resulted in large numbers of students enrolling in these areas further reducing the numbers of students in tertiary bound courses and stretching schools' ability to offer a comprehensive range of programs. As these pressures in the upper school mounted and schools struggled to address the resourcing issues, so too did the problems in the middle years increase as principals juggled resources to satisfy competing demands.

These drivers and demands, along with the implementation of the Local Area Education Planning Policy resulted in dramatic changes within the secondary school system in Western Australia. Extensive community consultation that focused on developing local solutions to meet the needs of the local area and the local population drove the decisions and resulted in the continuing changing face of the delivery of education.

The State of Western Australia has the luxury of a growing population and an economic resource base that allows for the creation of new educational environments that will prepare students for a rapidly changing world. These environments are characterised by strong partnerships with the community, industry, the tertiary sector, external training providers, community organizations and many other organizations that are working with children, youth and families.

First Wave of Major Reform

The first wave of major reform resulted in the development of a number of unique and creative approaches. Underpinning this reform agenda, however, was a massive investment in teacher development and training and change management as it was acknowledged by the system, principals and teachers that unless the pedagogy changed, structural change meant little on its own.

The planning process allowed many innovative and positive ideas to come from the community and encouraged them to consider the particular needs of students.

In particular, a unique opportunity was presented to develop culturally appropriate environments to engage Aboriginal communities in meeting the specific needs of their students.

Emerging Models

- **Mandurah.** A \$17m Senior Campus for Year 11 and 12 students, co-located with the local TAFE and a university was established. The two comprehensive High Schools became Middle Schools for Years 8 to 10 and in addition the first purpose-built \$16m Middle School was created.
- **Belmont.** Two Senior High Schools, Belmont and Kewdale amalgamated to create the Belmont City College that provided a Middle Schooling environment in the adolescent years and a young adult environment in the senior years. \$7m was allocated to this project.
- **Cannington/Maddington.** The existing Cannington Senior High School was demolished and in its place a purpose-built \$7m Senior College was created, now known as Sevenoaks Senior College. This College has strong links with local industry and has developed flexible organisational structures that best suit the local students such as extended school day and student access to their educational programs through the Internet.

The existing Maddington Senior High School became a Middle School, now known as Yule Brook Community College, and the existing Cannington Primary School became a K-10 school, now known as Cannington Community College incorporating purpose-built environments at a cost of \$7m to meet the changing pedagogical approaches.

This concept has proven to be very attractive to the local community with families moving back into the area to enrol their students in the early years at the Community College so that they obtain guaranteed entry to the highly regarded Senior Campus.

- **Western Suburbs.** The closure of Hollywood and Swanbourne Senior High Schools resulted in an innovative new purpose-built two campus Senior High School, now known as Shenton College, at a cost of \$23.5m catering for the middle and senior years. \$10.5m was allocated to substantially refurbish surrounding secondary schools.
- **Goldfields.** \$12m was spent to create a new Senior Campus collocated with Curtin University and a complete redesign of the existing school to accommodate the implementation of middle schooling pedagogy.

The increase in student numbers in Western Australia, combined with the Local Area Education Planning process has changed the face of education in Western Australia and by 2002 the number of schools had increased to 778 as seen in table 2.

Table 2: Types and numbers of schools in Western Australia, 2002

	OTHER	METRO	RURAL	TOTAL
Senior High Schools		51	26	77
High Schools		2	5	7
Senior Colleges & Campuses		6	1	7
District High Schools		6	54	60
Primary schools		312	202	514
Schools of the Air			5	5
Special Aboriginal Schools			31	31
Special Schools		52	18	70
Agricultural Schools			6	6
School of Isolated and Distance Education	1			1
	1	429	348	778

A comparison of table 1 and table 2 demonstrates the change in profile of the types of schools that have emerged over the past twenty or so years to meet the changing needs of young people in our society.

Table 3 : Comparison of types of schools

TYPES OF SCHOOLS IN 1980				TYPES OF SCHOOLS IN 2002					
	OTHER	METRO	RURAL	TOTAL		OTHER	METRO	RURAL	TOTAL
SHS					SHS				
	46					51			
	22					26			
	68					77			
HS					HS				
	5					2			
	4					5			
	9					7			
					SEN.C				
						6			
						1			
						7			
DHS					DHS				
						6			
	53					54			
	53					60			
PS					PS				

260
242
502

312
202
514

S.AIR

5
5

SAS

SAS

22
22

31
31

SP.S

SP.S

17
10
27

52
18
70

AG.S

6
6

SIDE

SIDE

1

1

1

1
328
353
682

1
429
348
778

CODE FOR SCHOOLS

SHS
Senior High Schools

SP.S
Special Schools

HS
High Schools

SIDE
School of Isolated & Distance Education

DHS
District High Schools

SEN.C
Senior Colleges & Campuses

PS
Primary Schools

S.AIR
Schools of the Air

SAS
Special Aboriginal Schools

Conclusion

Local Area Education Planning in Western Australia as a process has now become embedded in the normal review and planning across the government school system and within schools. The established criteria have indeed been critical in improving access to a better range of curriculum choices, specialist programs and quality facilities.

It has been a major catalyst for the creation of partnerships with the tertiary sector, training sector, business and industry, community groups, private providers, other government agencies and those who have the well being of young people at heart.

It has enabled schools to provide flexible pathways and innovative and sustainable programs to implement massive reforms as they grapple to improve outcomes for a diverse group of students against a backdrop of continuous educational and societal change.

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