

I strongly support Minister Rockliff's efforts to make year 12 more accessible to all young Tasmanians. The current college system which separates the final two years of high school creates a barrier for many young people and their families. I know of one family living in Smithton who wanted to support their 16 year old daughter to attend college in Burnie. There was the option of a two hour bus trip each way, each day or securing lodging and board for the daughter in Burnie. Neither option was acceptable. Instead mother and daughter rented a caravan in a holiday park in Ulverstone and stayed there during the school week. The daughter was supported to go to college but the family was separated with Dad and a younger brother remaining in Smithton. This is really an unacceptable sacrifice and expense to ensure a minimum qualification level. I appreciate that the Premier has now created the opportunity to attend years 11 and 12 in Smithton and I applaud this. I understand however, that many other regional towns and rural communities are not so fortunate.

The college system is elitist and caters for the brightest and most able and privileged students. It works well in the ACT where colleges are readily accessible in a geographically small territory and a highly educated population expects year 12 as a minimum qualification. It is an inappropriate model for a geographically dispersed community with high unemployment, low completions and a culture that views "leaving" as a celebration at the end of year 10. There is little understanding of the support and guidance required to support, nurture and inspire disadvantaged young people to remain at school. They are forced to leave a supportive middle school experience, a strong peer group circle and teachers who know them and their families. Some young people can manage this well but for others it is daunting. When it is compounded by poverty, a lack of family support and indifferent teachers it is easy to understand the high drop out.

There are far too many different subjects available through the colleges. This is expensive, unnecessary and educationally unsound. Unlimited choice is not an indicator of quality. Government funded schooling should be limited to subjects that prepare students in the broadest sense for tertiary study and/or employment.

I attended years 11 and 12 in Canada in the 1960s. I was bused to a school at some distance from my home. Nevertheless I did not know of anyone that did not continue their studies through to year 12. It is deeply concerning that 50 years later in Tasmania this is still not the expectation of all teachers. I have heard college principals, teachers and even politicians claim that "year 12 is not for everyone". To me that translates to "not everyone deserves a fair go". If attendance to year 12 and attainment of the TCE is not valued and supported by teachers how can we hope to have it valued and supported by the wider community?