

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO NSW GOVERNMENT'S
MANAGEMENT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

HEARING 2 – 11 AUGUST 2021

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

ANSWERS TO TRANSCRIPT QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Ms Harrison. I might just ask you one—we will talk to the teacher unions later. When, for example, did you specifically talk to the teacher unions ahead of the Premier's announcement about this return to school?

Ms HARRISSON: I will need to check the specific dates of the call but it was either the evening before or the morning of that I was able to give them a call to alert them to the specific announcement that was coming up that an intention to return to year 12 was being announced and that we would work with them in partnership in the plan for that delivery.

ANSWER

The Secretary had a phone call with the President of the NSW Teachers Federation on 27 July 2021, the evening before the announcement by the Premier.

QUESTION 2

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Excellent, my pleasure. Minister, can I come back to the question about the vaccinations. Are you able to provide us with a number of students who have been vaccinated at Qudos Bank Arena over the last two days?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Ms Owen to provide the information that we have but also just note that, as you would appreciate, the vaccine rollout is being done by Health so any sort of specific questions would be better directed to them. But I know that Ms Owen has an overview certainly from the last couple of days so I am happy for her to provide that.

Ms OWEN: Thanks, Minister. Ms Houssos, the number of students vaccinated as at close yesterday was 6,500.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What proportion of available appointments was that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We can probably take that on notice but it might be a question better directed to Health because, like I said, they are controlling all of the vaccine bookings and appointments, not us. I understand you had them here yesterday. You have got an opportunity to put questions on notice. Health is doing the rollout at Qudos Bank Arena, not Education. So we are not in a position to provide that level of detail. That is my understanding.

ANSWER

The Department understands that over 16,000 students were vaccinated as part of the Qudos Bank Arena vaccination hub for HSC students in South Western Sydney.

NSW Health are responsible for the vaccine rollout in NSW and further questions should be directed to them.

QUESTION 3

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Over 50 per cent were booked in. Minister, can I ask if you will commit to releasing the data by LGA of what percentage of HSC students were vaccinated this week, once it is completed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to take that on notice. As I said, we would have to do that in consultation with Health, and I am not sure in terms of private personal information of students as well, but I appreciate the intention that the Committee would like to get an understanding of roughly how many students have been vaccinated and the percentage, so we will take that on notice and see what we can provide, noting of course that we are on day three of what I think is a six-day rollout, so we will be in a position to provide more information to the Committee on notice and happy to give you what we can.

ANSWER

This question should be directed to NSW Health, who are responsible for the vaccine rollout in NSW.

QUESTION 4

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have asked about students being vaccinated. I do not think we quite got an answer before. Are you now tracking the number of teachers who are vaccinated, the actual proportion of teachers who are vaccinated?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Ms Harrison to comment in relation to what information the department has about that.

Ms HARRISSON: Thank you, Ms Houssos, for the question. I think, as is the case for all other health information, it is personal information held by the individual, not by the employer. We do not have records of vaccinations of teachers. What we do have is some understanding from the three local government areas where we are able to offer priority access to the Pfizer vaccine before the broader vaccination advice relating to AstraZeneca changed. We were able to get a sense of how many teachers in those LGAs booked in. It was a very strong proportion, and I can provide the details of that on notice. But at this stage we are not tracking vaccinations of teachers. The appointment booking process does not capture that information and enable us to do that.

ANSWER

Please refer to the answer to supplementary question 3.

QUESTION 5

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Ms Harrison. I think you have answered my question. Can I move on to the KPMG report? You may object to that term, but the KPMG consultancy docs.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is not a report. We answered that earlier, Mr Graham.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, the KPMG consultancy. Ms Harrison perhaps—although, Minister, feel free to answer this—what is the cost of that work?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Ms Harrison to respond to that one.

Ms HARRISSON: I think, as I indicated in my answers earlier, we have seconded four staff from KPMG for a period of time into the organisation. We will use that resource over the coming weeks and I will be happy following that, once we have that final cost, to share that back with the Committee. At this stage I do not have the specific costs on what will happen in the future but I will, when that has completed, be able to provide some advice on notice.

ANSWER

The cost will be determined by the length and extent of the engagement and will be reported at the conclusion of the engagement as required under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* and the emergency procurement provisions.

QUESTION 6

The CHAIR: Ms Harrison, you said that four people have been seconded from KPMG to work on the return to school plan, to address the COVID safety return to school plan. Is that right, four people?

Ms HARRISSON: I did not say that they had been seconded to work on the COVID-safe return. I have been very clear they have been seconded to work in a program management office and to help us keep track of all the number of work streams we have underway in relation to the COVID response. They are not working on the plan. They are seconded to manage and lead for us the setup of a program management office.

The CHAIR: Do any of them have public health or teaching experience, because it has been widely reported that, in fact, some of the experience comes from being British parachute officers? Do any of them have public health or education experience?

Ms HARRISSON: They have been seconded to work in a program management office, and they all have experience in program management. That is the skill set they are bringing to us. They will not be providing education or public health advice, so I am not sure that is a relevant skill set for us to be looking for in them. We are asking them to provide program management support. That is what they bring experience in, and that is what we will be utilising in our response.

The CHAIR: So I take it from that that none of them have public health or education experience. Is that right?

Ms HARRISSON: I do not have the details of all of their résumés with me, but I think that is a fair assumption, given that they are not being asked to come in and provide public health or education advice. They are coming in to support a program management office on secondment from an external firm.

The CHAIR: If you have got any more details, if you could provide that on notice—including the cost—that would be very useful.

ANSWER

The four staff from KPMG hold qualifications and skills relevant to the delivery of Project Management Office services.

The cost will be determined by the length and extent of the engagement and will be reported at the conclusion of the engagement as required under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* and the emergency procurement provisions.

QUESTION 7

The CHAIR: Minister, on those numbers this year, that is to less than 1 per cent of the student population, isn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What we have done—and, again, Ms Harrison might want to comment—is say to schools, "You tell us what you need." Of course, as I said earlier, David, a lot of schools or students will have their own devices. Schools can also loan out their existing devices to their school communities to use as well. So I would caution the Committee in making the assumption that this number of devices and internet access devices are the only ones that are available because they do not also take into account ones that schools can loan or also devices that students themselves may have as well.

Ms HARRISSON: I can provide some further information. We went out to schools ahead of the end of term two and asked them explicitly what they needed support with in preparing for potential learning from home, should we be required to use it. That included an ask, if they had one, for devices and dongles. We sent out devices to everyone who requested them. We have then sought to send out further devices to increase the ratios of devices in our schools, particularly in south-west Sydney, based on the socio-economic modelling that we have around communities to make sure we are getting as many devices and dongles into the communities that need them. I have spoken to a number of our principals in south-west Sydney. One of the things that they come back to us with is actually that technology is not always the thing that is going to help them, that the students that they are supporting need support learning at home.

They may not have space or a quiet room at home in order to do that work. So, for them, making sure that they can safely return those students in line with the COVID-safe plan is a really important part as we move forward for them to be able to support those students. I think we are really clear that we need to get more devices out. We have done so. With dongles, we reactivated every dongle we sent out last year. So we have provided internet access for just over 15,000 students across the State, with a large proportion of that in south-west Sydney. I am very happy to get you further details on notice, but I think in terms of the responsibilities of the education department here, we are doing everything we can to get the technology in the hands of those that need it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Chair, I think Ms Owen has got some download data as well, which might be useful to you as well.

The CHAIR: That would be helpful. Thanks, Ms Owen.

Ms OWEN: I will provide the Committee with the download data on notice. But to address your question, Chair, in terms of understanding where the demand is, we are tracking the download of all the different websites and resources that we have put on our learning from home hub. Those are in the hundreds of thousands. There are hundreds of different pages, so not appropriate to give you the detail here, but we will provide on notice how our schools have been downloading those key resources, which are the most highly downloaded data and downloaded resources, which shows how they are accessing the information online, as well as the information we have

about how they use multiple channels between downloaded information, online videos and paper packs as well.

The CHAIR: I think that would be useful. And if it could be broken down by school community, postcode or LGA, that would be useful.

Ms HARRISSON: I do not think we would be able to download the data in that way, unfortunately. We will be able to give you global figures for the downloads of information, but I do not think we would have that broken down by geography.

The CHAIR: I think it would be difficult to use that to understand how the digital divide has really impacted if it is just global figures, but we will get what we get. You do not have any data then about the number or proportion of students who are logging on to Google Classroom or to Zoom sessions so that we have some understanding about what the differential is between different socio-economic parts of the State? You do not have any of that data?

Ms HARRISSON: We can certainly look and see what of that data is available to us. I am happy to provide what we can find on notice.

ANSWER

The following Learning from home hub analytics are from the period 8 July 2021 to 23 August 2021.

There were 2,274,248 total page views.

The five most viewed pages were:

- Parents and carers landing page
- Learning from home landing page
- Learning packages for parents and carers
- Planning, programming and resources for teachers
- Year 1 and 2 learning packages

The five most downloaded files were:

- Year 1 & 2 English/literacy – Handwriting
- Remote learning guidelines for students and parents
- Kindergarten English/literacy – Phonics
- Year 3 & 4 English/literacy – Onomatopoeia – Part 1
- Learning environment checklist

In 2021;

- Google Classroom was accessed 748,694 times by students
- Zoom was accessed 450,884 time by students.

QUESTION 8

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Given the technological difficulties today, I have one final question for you. I assume you would need to take this on notice, but are you able to provide a breakdown of the attendance rates for schools either by LGA or by postcode of some description—just a snapshot of some point whilst we have been learning from home?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, absolutely. We can provide that on notice. What I will say is that broadly we have seen a very low attendance rate. It has averaged roughly about 92 per cent, 93 per cent of students learning from home across that whole Greater Sydney area. Obviously we have seen less attendance in those eight LGAs as well. And then as our regional communities have been brought in and out of lockdown that has had an impact too. But, by and large, we have had a very good response from our families to keep their children at home where they can. We have seen consistent numbers in terms of our overall attendance rates, but I am happy to provide some more detail on notice to the Committee.

ANSWER

In the week ending 20 August 2021 (Term 3, Week 6), an average of 95 per cent of all public school students across NSW were learning from home. This figure includes 95 per cent in the Greater Sydney area, 94 per cent in regional NSW, and 97 per cent learning from home in networks across the 12 LGAs of concern.

The breakdown of students learning from home by School Performance Directorate is as follows:

- Rural North: 93%
- Regional North and West: 94%
- Regional North: 94%
- Metropolitan North: 96%
- Metropolitan South: 96%
- Metropolitan South and West: 97%
- Regional South: 93%
- Rural South and West: 95%
- Connected Communities: 98%