

Isolated Children's Parents Association Qld Inc.

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Advocating for equitable education access, opportunities, and support for all rural and remote students

SUBMISSION:

2024-25 Queensland Budget Submission

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc. (ICPA Qld) advocates for equitable access to quality educational opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. ICPA Qld represents 45 branches, comprising of over 1200 families throughout the state.

ICPA Qld is a voluntary, apolitical parent organisation and is the only community-based parent group with interests in all sectors and levels of education – Early Childhood, State Schools, Boarding Facilities, Tertiary Education and Trade & Training, and all methods used to facilitate access to these platforms of education.

ICPA Qld State Council welcomes the opportunity provided by the Queensland Government's present this submission (2024-25 Queensland Budget Submission)

ICPA Qld acknowledges and welcomes the Queensland Government's significant investment of over \$645 million over four years into State Delivered Kindergarten (SDK). It is most pleasing to read the recent media releases advising that from that Kindergarten will be free for all young Queensland students from 1 January 2024. This historic reform highlights the value of a strong early childhood education providing a foundation for formal education success.

In rural and remote areas where opportunity for ready and reliable access to kindergarten programs was minimal to non-existent, the provision of SDK will be transformational. However, for many families, the ability to access this great opportunity often requires travel, sometimes for many kilometres. Additionally, in order to meet the family's needs and circumstances travel on a school bus is the most practicable and affordable mode of transport.

Current Translink policies do not support this. As Kindergarten is not a compulsory school year, Translink will not provide fiscal support to the school bus operator to allow them to accommodate the children safely, nor to remunerate the driver for the number of children on board. Additionally, the provided insurance coverage does not cover these children. It is up to each family to negotiate with the operator for the carriage of these



children and the operator must assume the full risk associated with the carriage of these children should they agree to transport them to and from school.

Many operators are averse to that level of risk, and it is quite possible the bus is not of sufficient capacity to carry those additional students. ICPA Qld is aware of the following situations occurring due to the current status of kindergarten student transport:

- a. Kindergarten children are simply not attending any program or,
- b. They are engaging with a program such as eKindy. While eKindy is a great program, given that SDK is available at their local school and face to face learning is invaluable at this age and stage of their development, it is not the optimal nor desired platform for their early learning.
- c. Parents are following the school bus, sometimes carrying their school aged children, to the local school so their kindergarten aged child/ren can engage with SDK.
- d. Where a bus operator has agreed to carry the child/ren and does not have sufficient capacity to carry all children (Translink will only assist with the cost associated for a bus upgrade based on the number of compulsory aged students), children are either having to take turns to attend, meaning they only attend 50% of their classes or some are being carried and some refused and having to arrange alternative transport.
- e. If a bus operator does not have sufficient space, rather than share or choose who/when to transport SDK students, they refuse to carry any and again alternate arrangements have to be made.
- f. Regardless of how families access SDK at their local school, again given that it is considered by Translink to be an optional learning year, they are unable to redress the expense of doing so as they are not deemed eligible for Conveyance Allowance.

This situation is untenable and requires resolution in order for all eligible Queensland students, regardless of location and family need and circumstance, to regularly and reliably access Kindergarten when it is available in their local community. As such ICPA Qld makes the following funding requests (text taken from ICPA Qld Key Issues Document):

ICPA Qld seeks the provision of the Conveyance Allowance to families travelling to access a Kindergarten program.

- The Conveyance Allowance is currently unavailable to families taking Kindergarten children via private transport to either a location where they could catch a school bus or, to the place of learning, a Kindergarten facility. In rural and remote locations, the kilometres covered can be considerable. The ability to access the Conveyance Allowance, would be of great assistance to parents and carers, and increase the likelihood of these students attending Kindergarten.

ICPA Qld seeks a guaranteed seating allocation on school buses for children attending Kindergarten in their local community.

- The Queensland Government's strong and ongoing investment in the State Delivered Kindergarten (SDK) program is a sign of the high level of value placed on this program. In rural and remote communities, attendance often requires transport to and from school on a bus. Provision of "fit for purpose" seating on these buses should be ensured so this young cohort can safely and consistently attend Kindergarten and develop strong foundational skills in preparation for future formal learning. Service operators need to be recompensed appropriately and they require extension of insurance coverage for the carriage of these students.

Funding of this initiative would assist in building on the Government's work on growing the economy through the key priorities:

- delivering better services -through the facilitation of better access to educational services
- protecting the Queensland lifestyle – through the provision of appropriate education and supporting services to strengthen and sustain regional, rural and remote communities and the lifestyle afforded through regional living



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- More jobs in more industries – improving the viability of rural and remote bus runs through the inclusion of kindergarten students on these routes, solidifying accessibility to early childhood learning programs will assist in the attraction and retention of employees in rural and remote areas and support existing business as well as provide an incentive for business growth and development

We believe it imperative that the above be funded from 2024 onwards in order for young rural and remote students and their families to benefit from the learning and experiences SDK will provide. It will underpin the continuity and consistency of early education offerings in rural and remote areas, whilst also maximising the return value of the significant investment the Queensland Government has made into SDK now and into the future.

ICPA Qld appreciates the opportunity to make this submission.



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