

LAFHAS ISSUE PAPER IN RESPONSE TO QUEENSLAND DROUGHT AND FLOOD DISASTERS

INTRODUCTION

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (Qld) Inc. represents the interests of over 1200 rural and remote Queensland families. It consists of forty-six Branches throughout regional and remote Queensland. ICPA Qld seeks to gain equitable access to educational opportunities for isolated children.

North West Qld Flood Event – Feb 2019

The recent flooding event which has decimated large parts of northern Queensland has seen the loss of over 500,000 cattle and infrastructure worth billions. Rural and remote families residing in these areas, running small and large business enterprises reliant on the agricultural industry, face years with extremely limited income and massive repair costs. The knock on effect to small business in affected communities is staggering.

Queensland Drought

The impact of drought is slow and unyielding. Many families have not seen any measurable income for many years and have completely de-stocked or are in the process of doing so. Financially, the effect on local businesses and entire communities is perilous and the mass exodus of population that ongoing drought has left in its wake is wretched.

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

The existing and potential impacts on education brought about by these weather events are massive. It is imperative that rural and remote students, however they access their education, are the highest priority, and that they are not left vulnerable or wanting during this time of unprecedented assault on our state.

Most of inland Queensland is either flood or drought affected. Qld has eight shires without a high school and a further three shires only offer schooling to Year 10. The majority of these families have children who board away from home to access their secondary education, as their geographical isolation makes access to a local high school unfeasible. The determination of which boarding facility children attend is very complex. Every family has different priorities and the freedom of choice is critical.

It is a harsh reality that many parents who have children away at boarding school are going to find it practically impossible to pay boarding school fees as the money will simply not be available. It is a real possibility that as the impact of the floods recede and the financial implications set in, families will be faced with the agonising decision to pull their children from boarding school to come home to study via distance education. The same can be said for drought affected families, as minimal future income after yet another wet season with hardly any rainfall becomes a reality. For children who due to the very nature of boarding school have ready access to social, sporting, academic and cultural opportunities, this change in their life's path would be unfair and unjustified.

It is imperative that government steps in to provide an immediate increase to the Living Away from Home Allowance in order to keep these students at boarding school in what is a time of critical national emergency.

LIVING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE SCHEME (LAFHAS)

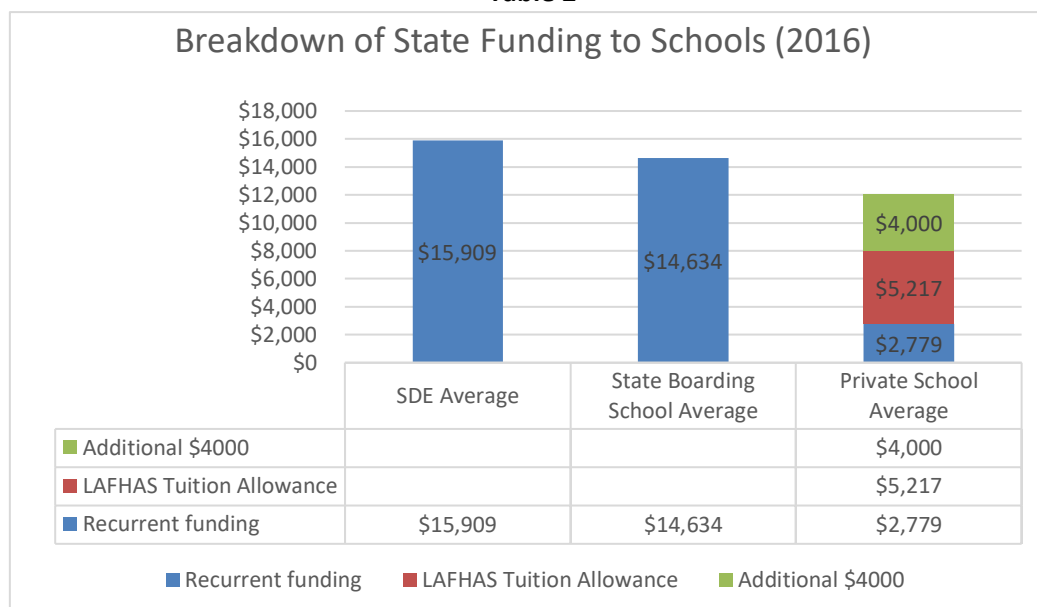
The LAFHAS is a Queensland Department of Education allowance paid biannually to geographically isolated students who, due to having no daily physical access to a school where they live, attend boarding school to access their education. The LAFHAS is adjusted annually in accordance with CPI. The main component of the LAFHAS is the Remote Area Tuition Allowance (RATuA) which supports approximately 1335 students. ICPA Qld sees an urgent need for a significant increase in the RATuA to offset the rising cost of boarding school tuition fees over recent years which has seen the steady erosion of the financial benefit of the scheme over time (refer to Table 1).

Table 1

Average tuition costs - allowance & out of pocket costs 2006 -2018



Table 2



(The 2016 figures are the latest recurrent funding information for state schooling available.)

ESSENTIAL FACTS AND FIGURES REGARDING LAFHAS

- Average Tuition fees at non-state boarding schools have increased by 87% over the last twelve years from \$6686 in 2006 to \$12 503 in 2018.
- Increase in the LAFHAS Remote Area Tuition Allowance (RATuA) has only been 53% from \$3 517 (2006) to \$5 391 (2018).
- The total dollars paid to families under the RATuA scheme in **2018 was \$6 520 930**.
- If all 1335 students in 2018 were to attend a school of distance education, the state government would have to fund (as per Table 2) on average \$15 909 per student, resulting in a total of **\$21 238 515**.
- Scenario costs are only approximately **\$3.4 million more** than what is presently being paid, however it is approximately **\$11 million less** than if the government had to meet its obligation for recurrent funding if all these students attended a school of distance education.

\$\$ - PROJECTED TOTAL SPEND - \$\$

Going on the 2018 enrolments of the 1335 eligible students with a \$4000 increase:

9% of students would receive the base payment each of \$4696 totalling - \$564 224

64% of students would receive the approximate average payment each of \$7044 totalling - \$6 018 394

27% of students would receive the maximum payment each of \$9391 totalling - \$3 384 986

\$9 967 604 (total spend with increase) - \$6 520 930 (2018 LAFHAS tuition costs) = \$3 446 674 (increase in funding required)

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