



ICPA Briefing Papers

Rural Schools

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Introduction

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), is a voluntary, apolitical, national parent organisation working on behalf of our members for equity of access to appropriate education for children living outside of metropolitan areas.

Rural schools across Australia can be disadvantaged in a variety of ways by the unique circumstance of being located in isolated areas. Conditions in rural schools often impact the whole school community, including students, staff, parents/families. These impacts also extend into the wider community such as local businesses and support services. These disadvantages need to be considered and addressed in order to ensure equitable educational opportunities are provided and educational outcomes are achieved for the geographically isolated students access these schools.

Remote and isolated locations in Australia encounter great challenges in improving delivery of education options and pathways for children and their families. The options for educating children in these locations continue to diminish and can be attributed to many families leaving these areas.

While all Australian governments recognise the social and economic benefits of a high quality and equitable school education system, ICPA (Aust) continues to devote an enormous amount of time holding relevant governments to account to address inequities in rural schools.



Summary

1. Implementation of the recommendation made by Professor Dr John Halsey in the 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report' to “reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning” (Halsey, 2018, p.37)”
2. Seek production of a booklet containing all the information associated with eligibility and entitlements for rural students for secondary and tertiary education, including apprenticeships and traineeships, to be provided to all rural high schools and final year primary students.
3. The School Chaplaincy Program in schools be continued beyond 2022 and priority given to providing access to these chaplaincy support services in remote or very isolated schools.
4. The methodology of the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for students travelling to Canberra to enhance their learning in civics and citizenship education be reconsidered and reviewed as it does not take into consideration the disadvantages of travelling from rural and remote areas compared to bigger centres.



Recommendations

ISSUE 1

Implementation of the recommendation made by Professor Dr John Halsey in the 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report' to “reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning” (Halsey, 2018, p.37)”

In our small schools we have witnessed our teaching principals being bombarded with training and administration duties, taking them away from the classroom and the important task of teaching our students. Professor Doctor John Halsey noted that “in a small school in particular where principals have a large teaching load, there is little time left for focussing on leading learning. Scaling back of the administration workload needs to happen to create more time for leading learning to be done and done well.” (Halsey, 2018, p.35)

Small school students require stability and continuity of learning just like their larger school counterparts and though we do not doubt our small school teaching principals are doing their utmost to ensure this occurs the amount of time out of the classroom is noticeable and disruptive. Time out of the classroom includes but is not limited to professional development, training and also the challenges that only a small school principal experiences such as co-ordinating trades people conducting maintenance, technical difficulties with information and communication technologies, break downs in equipment such as water pumps and important phone calls that require immediate attention. All of these responsibilities that are usually shared by many in a large school are only shared by two in a one teacher school. Planning, teaching and assessing students is a fulltime job! How does one person realistically do all of that as well as the added workload of a teaching principal? Teaching should be the main focus and administration tasks should be minimal and easy to achieve.

ICPA (Aust) recognises this is largely a state-based issue, however we would like to see the Federal Government advocate for state education departments to implement this recommendation made in the 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report'

Recommendation

That the recommendation made by Professor Dr John Halsey in the 'Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) – Final Report' to “reduce the impact of administration on workloads to create more time for teaching and leading learning” (Halsey, 2018, p.37)” be implemented.

ISSUE 2

Seek production of a booklet containing all the information associated with eligibility and entitlements for rural students for secondary and tertiary education, including apprenticeships and traineeships, to be provided to all rural high schools and final year primary students.

Increased awareness of incentives, entitlements and eligibility criteria encourage and expedite uptake of further education and training. This leads to upskilling of individuals and enhanced capabilities of entire communities. We call on Government Departments to be more transparent with what rural students are entitled to. Many families cite financial constraints as the main barrier to higher education for youth from regional areas. A booklet provided to final year primary students and high school students in rural / regional areas containing all relevant information for future pathways would help these students and families immensely and encourage them to explore higher education or vocational training they might otherwise consider being out of their reach.

Recommendation

That a booklet containing all the information associated with eligibility and entitlements for rural students for secondary and tertiary education, including apprenticeships and traineeships, be provided to all rural high schools and final year primary students.

ISSUE 3

The School Chaplaincy Program in schools be continued beyond 2022 and priority given to providing access to these chaplaincy support services in remote or very isolated schools.

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the news that the Australian Government is investing \$247 million over four years (2019-2022) to renew the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP).

Students face a myriad of challenges in their day-to-day life that can impact on their education. School chaplains play an important role in the school communities assisting students who are struggling with issues of self-doubt, bullying, peer pressure, anxiety, family breakdown, impacts of family drug and alcohol use and more. Due to the tyranny of distance, Guidance Officers are not as easily accessible for rural and remote schools and this is where the Chaplaincy Program is incredibly valuable.

With participating schools eligible to receive up to \$20,280 in metropolitan or regional areas and \$24,336 in remote or very remote areas, ICPA (Aust) welcomes this funding which will support approximately 3000 schools per year to access the services of a qualified chaplain and we encourage extension beyond 2022 to give rural and remote schools assurance that this beneficial assistance will continue.

Recommendations

Funding of school chaplaincy support services continue after 2022 and access to the program be made available at our nation's most remote or very isolated areas.

ISSUE 4

The methodology of the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for students travelling to Canberra to enhance their learning in civics and citizenship education needs to be reconsidered and reviewed as it does not take into consideration the disadvantages of travelling from rural and remote areas compared to bigger centres.

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) sliding scale used to determine allocation of funds to schools is unrealistic when applied to rural and remote schools. The PACER grant is provided to partially offset the cost of travel and accommodation for school students visits to Canberra and funds are allocated per student based on a school's distance from Canberra. This formula is somewhat unrealistic however given that rural and remote students would endure far more extensive costs to travel to Canberra despite their physical distance of the school on the physical scale compared to what is available from metropolitan areas.

Students living in rural and remote areas also have less transportation choices and often need to use a combination of travel methods in order to reach Canberra. While students from more populated areas can usually access air travel at a reasonable cost, rural and remote students face lengthy drives often coupled with hefty regional airfares which the PACER sliding scale does not seem to take into consideration.

For example, based on the sliding scale, Innamincka in South Australia is in the same zone as Brisbane, however travelling by air to Canberra from Brisbane would incur far less expense than travelling from Innamincka, which would first require travel to a metropolitan centre to access a flight.

Recommendations

Address the incongruity of the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for rural and remote schools with a change to the methodology used to calculate the funds allocated for the scheme which considers and recognises the extra costs associated with travel from a rural or remote area compared to a large urban centre.