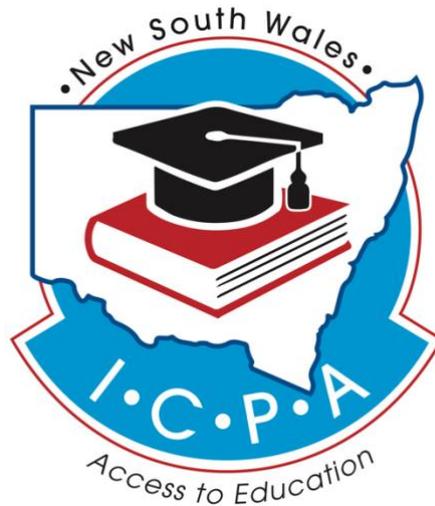


# **The Isolated Children's Parents' Association New South Wales Inc.**



## **Issues Paper OCTOBER 2020**

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## INTRODUCTION

ICPA-NSW is a voluntary non-profit organisation that has its roots firmly embedded in rural, remote and regional areas across the state. ICPA-NSW believes that all students, irrespective of where they live, are entitled to equity of access to education that they require to participate, to their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of a community.

Whatever the Educational/Learning Institute is, ICPA-NSW will advocate for:

- Mobile and rural preschools
- Regional primary and secondary schools
- Small rural and remote schools
- Schools of Distance Education
- Non-government schools
- Government schools
- Agricultural Colleges
- University
- TAFE

ICPA-NSW State Council will provide information, advice and support through a variety of portfolios:

- Early Childhood
- Rural Schools
- Distance Education and VISE
- Boarding Schools
- Agricultural High Schools and Hostels
- Tertiary Education
- Special Education
- Communications
- Allowances
- Travel

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly highlighted the challenges of educating children via remote learning. Across Australia, households have been juggling working from home and educating their children, which is something our members have been grappling with for decades and ICPA-NSW certainly sympathizes with our metro counterparts. The Pandemic and subsequent border closures has had a huge impact on rural and remote NSW children who board or travel daily interstate – 239 students to Qld, 97 to Victoria and 23 to South Australia. ICPA-NSW supports a consistent guideline for the movement of students across State borders to access their education and will strive to continue advocating and supporting our members as the situation continues to fluctuate.

The following pages highlight current issues with some recommendations that ICPA-NSW State Council are advocating for on behalf of its members across the state.

## Allowances

### *Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and school bypassing*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Department of Education consider students living in an ARIA mapped remote and very remote location who are currently ineligible to access the AIC Allowance due to the distance criteria 1, be deemed eligible to receive a Statement of Support in order to bypass the Local High School.**

Parents and students in the city have a choice of numerous public schools in their residential zone, often with free public transport, whereas people living in rural and remote towns only have one local school to send their child. An earthmoving contractor or shearing contractor based in a remote town may be working away on remote outposts during the week or for months at a time and not home every day to supervise their child, therefore requiring a boarding school option. Some children with high potential to succeed in music, sport or academics may need to go to a school that suits their individual capabilities. Families have many differing educational needs and therefore should be able to bypass the local school and access the AIC if their residential address falls within the ARIA mapping of a remote and very remote location.

### *Rural Hardship Education Fund*

**RECOMMENDATION: That there be a Rural Hardship Education Fund established to assist families with education expenses who are experiencing financial hardship during times of disaster.**

The Introduction of a Rural Hardship Education Fund is desperately needed to assist the many families in drought-stricken areas who are struggling to afford to educate their children, and ensure rural and remote students' education continues unchanged in times of drought and other rural hardship whether they are boarding away from home, attending a local rural school/kindergarten or studying via distance education.

There is precedence for government assistance in previous droughts and times of rural hardship through the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme and other initiatives. In 2005, during a period of drought, there was an increase in the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance. In the next drought, the Exceptional Circumstances Program, which no longer exists, added a supplementary payment to the AIC Additional Boarding Allowance, during the years 2008-2011 before reverting back in 2012. Financial assistance to lessen the burden of educational costs must be established urgently for rural families battling to keep their children at school.

The Federal Government is currently offering drought assistance funding to independent boarding schools, where the schools apply for funding (schools need to know family's financial

situations) and can assist students they identify, but that this does not guarantee that assistance gets to every student needing it, for example it leaves out rural small schools, distance education and tertiary students.

In 2020 there are still many drought and fire affected areas across NSW. Families in these areas are struggling with the cost of educating their children. Many of the government and charity sector financial aid programs are for specific purposes and do not allow the money to be spent on education expenses. There have been previous instances where there have been one off payments made to affected households who were impacted by natural disasters. We are in need of an allowance for all farming families, and the rural business families (including shop owners, contractors) to ensure all students get the necessary education whilst living through the current drought.

### *One off Drought Payment*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the Minister for Education and the Minister for Agriculture and Western NSW develop a one-off drought payment for Geographically Isolated students receiving AIC payments.**

The NSW Government have delivered Local Land Service rate cuts and Freight Subsidies and there have been some drought measures for preschool (although not very remote pre-schoolers) and maintaining teacher numbers in schools, but there has been no assistance for geographically isolated students particularly those in high school. The economic return of investment in education is almost immeasurable yet families who cannot access a local high school through geographic isolation are finding it financially devastating to provide any form of education to their children. A drought education payment to geographically isolated children may be the difference between that child being able to stay in school.

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## Boarding Schools and Agricultural High Schools

### *COVID-19 Border Closures*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Chief Health Officer negotiate a consistent plan with other State Chief Health Officers for the movement of boarding school children so that they can continue to access their education interstate during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Nearly 400 rural and remote boarding school children in NSW have been seriously impacted by the unnecessary separation from their home and family during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and resultant border closures. ICPA-NSW was at the forefront of a very robust lobby for exemptions for QLD, SA and VIC boarding children who reside in NSW and we implore the NSW Government to support our advocacy for children to be transported the most direct route home to self isolate on rural and remote properties during exit weekends and school holidays. These children must board away from home to access a compulsory education and families need assurances that there is a consistent and workable COVID safe management plan in place for the movement of children across the borders,

ICPA-NSW thanks the NSW Minister for Education and NSW Government for advocating for these children and their families, considering many children attend schools outside the NSW Education jurisdiction, the support and advice for the Minister and her staff was duly noted and appreciated. ICPA-NSW thanks the NSW Government for recent exemptions for Victorian children accessing NSW for education and the issuance of the 8B permit for parents to transport NSW children back to school in non restricted areas of Victoria, rather than having to fly home via Sydney.

### *Establishment Government Agricultural Boarding Schools*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Government establish one or more new boarding schools in rural and regional areas of NSW, including at least one in the North West of the state which could accommodate female boarders.**

There is a need for more government run boarding facilities for children in NSW and particularly for girls in the north west of the state. Currently the only Government Boarding Schools in NSW are Yanco Agricultural High School in the south of the state which is co-educational, Hurlstone Agricultural High School closer to Sydney, which is co-educational, and Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School in the north west of the state which is only for boys. Presumably many of the male students who board at Farrer MAHS have female siblings who also have need of government boarding facilities.

The Review into Agricultural education and training in NSW report 2013 recommendation 13 “The NSW Dept of Education explores options for a designated agricultural high school in central NSW such as Dubbo and would need accommodation facilities for females and males.” In 2019 with the worsening economic and environmental conditions in rural areas, families that were unable to afford to send their children away to boarding schools were left with little choice for a quality education for their children. There are distance education options available, but this can put children at a serious disadvantage when their class size can be as small as three other students. These students may also not have access to team sports or extra-curricular activities, parents and care givers in many cases feel unable to support the students learning, creating extra stress and burden on families. If more hostel options were available in larger towns in rural and regional NSW this would give parents the option to be able to board their children in these safe, managed environments and allow access to a quality education with the ability to be involved in sport, extra-curricular activities and learn the skills they need to adjust socially to a broader environment.

More State Boarding schools, State Agricultural High Schools and Hostels are needed throughout NSW as COVID 19 has highlighted these issues regarding closures of State Borders and the added pressure and stress on both students and families that were inflicted during this time. Some families are now considering NSW Regional boarding options.

**RECOMMENDATION: That acceptance letters to state boarding schools be distributed earlier in the year to align with acceptance of scholarships and paying of deposits at private schools.**

For families in rural and remote areas, the decision-making process around accessing secondary education for their children is difficult to navigate.

Often a scholarship to a private boarding school needs to be accepted and a deposit for the following year paid before acceptance letters from state boarding schools are made available. By government schools bringing their acceptance process forward and sending out acceptance letters earlier, parents will be better placed to make the best choice for their child by comparing all the options simultaneously.

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Government make a significant investment in buildings at Yanco Agricultural High School**

Yanco Agricultural High School (YAHS) has been a corner stone of public agricultural education since 1922. Since the introduction of co-education in 1993 enrolments have increased steadily and peaked in 2013, 2014 and 2015 where numbers were consistently around 380 with a fairly even split between male and female students. The current capacity for the

school is 360 students in a fully co-ed boarding facility and our aim is to make sure all students are housed in permanent buildings with reverse cycle air conditioning. YAHS is the only boarding school in Australia that has obligate weekly and termly boarders, there are no day students. Hurlstone aside, with only 30 boarders in total, YAHS is the only public co-ed boarding school in the state and certainly the only facility catering for the needs of families in western NSW.

We thank the NSW Minister for Education for addressing the issues relating to the girls dormitories, it is important to continue to invest in all buildings at this school that caters for the needs of rural and remote NSW families.

### *Education costs and the drought*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW government as a matter of urgency, consider implementing a low interest loan, with similar terms to the HECS scheme, to those affected by drought or other natural disaster to assist with fees associated with education.**

The drought and bushfires in NSW has placed enormous pressure on the ability to finance the secondary boarding education of children. As cashflows are reduced, the cost of accessing secondary education remains one of the single biggest line items in a family's budgets. The financial pressure to keep children at boarding school or indeed to start children at boarding school is causing immense mental health stress for both parents and children.

A low interest loan, with similar terms to HECs, repayable when income returns, would allow parents to access secondary education at boarding schools with certainty. It would reduce the number of students who either have to leave boarding school or not start boarding school because of a lack of cash flow caused by drought.

Anecdotally, we are aware that there was a 28% across the board drop in rural and remote boarding students into Year 7 in Sydney boarding schools in 2019. For many families they do not have a choice. Boarding school is their only secondary school option and therefore they take on the financial burden while suffering through the drought with no certainty as to how they will maintain their children at their schools.

A low interest loan designated for educational purposes would also allow farming businesses to utilise cashflow to reinvest into their businesses and therefore the local economies. ICPA-NSW propose that the facility be available to all eligible AIC families, enabling those without a large asset base to access the low interest loan. The low interest loan also means that the

NSW government would have a return on their investment, not just monetary, but in the further education of remote and rural communities.

This scheme would be life changing for parents and children in these isolated communities.

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## **Distance Education (DE)**

### *Child Care Subsidy age criteria*

**RECOMMENDATION: that the age criteria of Child Care Subsidy (CCS) be changed from 0-13 years and in primary school to 0-15 years and in primary or secondary school as part of support for isolated families under special circumstances.**

*ICPA-NSW is aware that CCS is a federal issue, however we request that the NSW Government support this position in discussions with their Federal and State Colleagues.*

With the drought and subsequent recovery period, families have had to make the decision to keep their children home to complete the beginning of their high school years via Distance Education instead of going to boarding school. Due to both parents being required out in the paddock at all sorts of times or working off farm to earn extra income, the continuance of Child Care Subsidy access for these families to enable the children to have the supervision and support of an educator in an otherwise isolated location is vital.

As an example, a family in Western NSW has twin boys who will fall outside the criteria as they enter high school in 2020. The supervision and support is vital given the isolation and remote location. Both parents need to work on the property given the current drought situation, which means the boys would be left unsupervised and this then becomes a safety issue due to no mobile service and neighbours being 40 kilometres away. It is vital that Child Care Subsidy (CCS) be continued to enable them to afford to have the supervision and support of an educator in an isolated location.

Children aged between 12 and 15 still require some supervision, especially if at home alone in a remote location. The extension of Child Care Subsidy to this age group would enable parents

to continue working on the farm away from the house or off farm, without disruption to the child.

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### ***Increased computer use - Distance Education***

**RECOMMENDATION: That a second computer in the home-based schoolroom would relieve pressure and be more productive for multiple students in one schoolroom.**

Distance Education and School of the Air students are expected to spend growing amounts of time on the computer with reliance on computer-based schooling techniques such as software like Google Classroom to do the teaching. This is especially difficult for families with multi stage students in the home school room.

For School of the Air Students currently enrolled at Broken Hill SOTA, the timetabling issues are making it very difficult for computers to be used especially if there is more than one child in the school room.

With the changes from the Optus Satellite to NBN Skymuster due to change hopefully at the end of 2021, ensuring children have the appropriate technology to allow them to utilize React and online resources in their education will be vital. ICPA-NSW would like to be involved with the process of planning and rolling this out, we will continue to follow this up in Early 2021 after the trials have been completed.

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### ***2<sup>nd</sup> Year VISA for governesses under the Agriculture criteria***

**RECOMMENDATION: That governesses or a rural farm nanny be included as a category of eligible work to qualify for extending a 417 visa**

*ICPA-NSW is aware this is a federal issue; however, ICPA-NSW request the NSW Government to support this recommendation and highlight the matter with federal counterparts.*

Some ICPA members have employed excellent qualified international teachers, however as this employment has not qualified them for extending the 417 visa they are forced to leave at the end of the year. They have played a critical role in the supervision of the children's learning and once that positive relationship is established it is critical that it be able to be extended.

It is currently acceptable to employ a fully qualified international teacher or nanny to feed sheep in the most remote locations by themselves posing huge Health and Safety risk for themselves and the farm, yet they are not allowed to supervise children in a safe environment whilst the parent completes the critical farm work. This is counterproductive and economically hurts the rural business. It is increasingly difficult to attract suitable staff to very remote locations and childcare in very remote locations is just as important as any other farm tasks.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted the difficulties many families across Australia have had with learning from home and this is not a new issue for rural and remote families. ICPA-NSW therefore hopes that there is more understanding around the issue of supervision of Distance Education children.

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### ***Recognition of work experience for graduate teachers***

**RECOMMENDATION: That graduate teachers be employed as home tutors in a distance education school room and that the time be recognised work experience.**

There are several benefits of having a 'recognition of work experience' incentive for graduate teachers to be employed as a home tutor in a distance education school room. For the students, they are being supervised by someone who is a graduate teacher. For the graduate teacher, the advantage is that they have a full-time job (including board and keep), they are working in the industry they have trained for under the guidance of an experienced teacher, and they are gaining experience working in a multistage classroom. This also has the potential to encourage qualified teachers to move to rural and remote areas.

**RECOMMENDATION: That NSW Department of Education (DoE) provides preschool places at Bourke Walgett School of Distance Education (BWSODE)**

Currently, the Bourke Walgett School of Distance Education (BWSODE) does not offer Preschool. Students in the area covered by the BWSODE, are required to undertake Preschool through Dubbo School of Distance Education (DSODE), Broken Hill School of The Air (BHSOTA) or in some cases to the north of the Bourke Shire, Charleville SOTA.

Parents who have more than one child are having to choose between staying at the above schools or split their families and enrolling their students into two centres (e.g. the pre-schooler in Dubbo, and their year one student in BWSODE which is practically challenging in a school room and logistically demanding.

Therefore, students are continuing their education through the other centres and not returning to BWSODE.

To overcome students going to other centres, the distance education modules of preschool should be rolled out through the BWSODE to ensure local students attend their local Distance Education centre.

**RECOMMENDATION: That NSW Department of Education (DoE) implements an initiative to ensure practical access to secondary schooling for geographically isolated stage four students using the existing primary school facilities in remote and very remote areas.**

For many years NSW DoE has not provided practical high schooling options for some isolated children who are beginning high school.

The students this recommendation refers to are those who, for many reasons, are unable to successfully assimilate into a boarding school environment. These children may be emotionally unready to leave their families to attend boarding school or because of a variety of other prohibiting reasons.

The only practical pathway left to access high school is by Distance Education (DE). Successful DE requires a tutor and an appropriate place in which to study.

Currently children in this category are unable to access In Home Care (CCB) or financial aid for the employment of a home tutor. The Distance Education Allowance may financially cover the setting up of a school room however some students are without a space to 'set up'. There have been instances whereby indigenous high school students could access two hours a week tuition but that was at the discretion of the distance education centre and two hours a week is nowhere near enough time.

Many students whom this Recommendation addresses are living within acceptable driving distance of a NSW primary school that is resourced to meet their needs. The model has varying precedents. In the 1980s and 90s DE secondary students could come to the local primary school and quietly complete their leaflets. In another instance students were tutored in an un-air-conditioned village hall! Recently indigenous students were given permission by the generosity of a principal to come to school and the DE centre provided a tutor, for two days of the week. These arrangements have been advocated for privately and are ad hoc. Therefore, in some instances, remote families are anxious when their children are nearing stage four (Year 7).

Latterly with the increase of regulations accessing the primary schools' facilities for studying high school has been more difficult. This situation has led to parents arranging for their children to repeat Year 6. In some instances, the whole community worries and wants the year 6 student to repeat because effectively that 'buys' them one more year of school. The family and community recognise it will be those students' last chance of a genuine school year.

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## Early Childhood

### *Preschools – Taking too long to choose providers, site & staff*

**Recommendation: All tasks are completed simultaneously**

Expressions of Interest to be advertised to all providers in the area which have the capacity to fulfil the role. The working committee with the CCSA choose the most appropriate provider.

At the same time a site should be chosen, and all necessary upgrades and renovations be expediently completed and the educator for the preschool also be selected.

### *Four year trained early childhood teachers' salaries*

**Recommendation: That the lack of parity between four year trained early childhood teachers and four year trained primary and high school teachers be amended**

It is necessary for the Department of Education (DoE) to take over the salary payments of early childhood teachers so that they can be offered the same salary package as their four-year trained colleagues who are working in primary and high schools.

Currently, the pay gap is so significant it is virtually impossible to recruit and retain teachers in early childhood centres and new recruits often use early childhood jobs as a steppingstone into the better paid positions in the primary school sector.

Attracting and retaining teaching staff is particularly unsustainable in the remote context because the early childhood packages are without comparable incentives such as holiday pay, provision for housing, access to professional support and travel to attend professional development.

### *Criteria for priority to be added to so that isolated pre-schoolers are able to access 600 hours of preschool*

**RECOMMENDATION: Three and four year olds, who live in remote or very remote places be included in the criteria, to be considered priority for access to pre school**

Due to vast distances, it is very difficult for many rural and remote Pre schoolers to access 600 hours of preschool in just one year. It is more pragmatic to smooth this process over a two year period.

ICPA-NSW believes if the above suggestion were adopted the Strong Start Guidelines would be of more rigour and the criteria would read as follows (**new inclusion in bold**). Services would be required to give equal priority of access to:

- children who are at least 4 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school

- children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July in that preschool year and from low income and/or Aboriginal families
- children with English language needs
- children with disability and additional needs
- children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).
- *Add \*Children whose address is in a remote or very remote location.*

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## **Rural Schools**

### ***Rural Experience Teacher Program***

ICPA-NSW thanks the NSW Department of Education for the opportunity for rural schools to participate in the Rural Experience Teacher Program. This program has made a positive difference to rural and remote schools and ICPA-NSW supports the continuance of the program.

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### ***Rural Area Relief teachers (RAR)***

**RECOMMENDATION: That Rural Area Relief (RAR) positions are retained for TP1 and TP2 schools so that relief teaching staff can be accessed when required.**

Rural schools currently have access to a Rural Area Relief (RAR) teacher when covering teaching staff on leave or when attending professional development. These positions are filled on a temporary basis and at the end of each contract the position is reviewed. School principals are continually fighting for the positions to continue as casual teacher availability is extremely low in rural areas. These positions are vital in ensuring schools remain operational in the event

of an unexpected illness and/or leave. TP1 and TP2 schools have a low number of staff and do not have the ability to split classes in the event of an unexpected absence.

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### *Face to face counselling sessions*

**RECOMMENDATION: That rural and remote schools have access to face to face counselling sessions for students and that boarding schools have access to psychologists to assist students with their mental health whilst coping with the drought.**

Many rural and remote schools do not have access to a face to face counsellor. Compounding this is the fact that many children are away at boarding school trying to cope with the pressures of drought back home. Students are being disadvantaged without real access to face-to-face counselling sessions to support their academic, social and emotional welfare and it is especially vital given the long-term.

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### *Time spent out of the classroom*

**RECOMMENDATION: That the recommendations made by Professor 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.**

In small rural and remote schools too much time is spent on administration duties and training taking them away from the important task of teaching the students. Time out of the classroom includes, but is not limited to, professional development, training and also challenges that only a small school principal experiences such as co-ordinating trades people conducting maintenance, technical difficulties with ICT’s, break downs in equipment such as water pumps and important phone calls that require immediate attention. All 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 full-time job. Teaching should be the focus and administration tasks should be minimal and easy to achieve.

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### *Appropriate vehicle for very remote schools*

**RECOMMENDATION: That a 4WD vehicle be provided as part of the incentive package for the principal in very remote schools where there are no essential services and unsealed roads.**

In schools where there are no essential services such as doctors, dentists, supermarkets and day to day needs, a vehicle should be included in the principal's incentive package. This is also a very important safety issue for the children. When the principal and students need to travel to extracurricular activities they travel on unsealed and rough roads. Without an appropriate 4WD vehicle some students would not be able to attend. For some parents it is too costly to get their children to these activities and without a vehicle attached to the principal and the school some students would miss out. With vast distances, unsealed roads and the costs involved in running a vehicle in these conditions it can be very expensive for an incoming principal. The added vehicle expense would be a deterrent for applicants, once again leaving these very remote schools at a disadvantage.

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### *Handover between incoming and outgoing principals*

**RECOMMENDATION: That in all TP1 rural and remote schools a handover be mandatory, with a five-week program in place the new principal can learn the new role without the students learning being disadvantaged.**

A decade ago, an ICPA motion requesting a 'handover' between principals of TP1 and TP2 schools, was carried. On the conference floor the then Director Western Plains spoke affirming this initiative. The motion asked for a Department of Education policy to embed a system whereby all outgoing principals leave a five-week program, staff, student and community

information, as well as all necessary information and documentation that is required in a rural and remote school, for the incoming principal. In the intervening years ICPA-NSW has had this motion resubmitted and carried. Once again ICPA-NSW has enjoyed assurances from the DoE staff that the handover does or will routinely be actioned. The rationale for this request is obvious. It would be of benefit to the incoming principal, students and parents. The school program could be taught from the first day of the new principal's tenure, allowing them to adjust to what is often an extremely new working environment. There are new administration duties required by the Department for a principal who is, at the same time assessing, their students' learning, acquainting themselves with the community and families and discovering the school's resources. It has taken up to two terms for the principal to understand the complexity of teaching in a multi-stage classroom. ICPA-NSW strongly believes two terms is too long for the students not to be working at their required level.

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### ***Re-classification of TP2 Schools***

**RECOMMENDATION: That TP2 schools be allowed two calendar years with numbers below 26 and then put on review for a following year before being reclassified as a TP1 School.**

ICPA-NSW thanks the NSW Government for the drought assistance measures offered to drought affected schools to ensure staff can remain employed, despite the drop in enrolments and believes that schools need time to recover before being reclassified..

After workers have been dismissed due to drought, it typically requires 2-3 years for these workers to be replaced when the drought has broken. When sourcing new employees, the size of the local primary school can have an enormous effect on the ability to attract new families/employees to an isolated, rural district. With the current limited time provided for schools with enrolments falling below a certain number an isolated school is likely to be reclassified.

### ***Telehealth Services***

***RECOMMENDATION: That increased Telehealth services be made available to rural and remote schools***

- Teachers trained to identify different learning styles and or physiological trauma and disabilities.
- Telehealth with quality counsellors who are consistently managing the one child and Allied Health Services such as speech and other services.
- These extra professional services must be claimable on Medicare and IPTAAS (Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme).
- Clarity of availability of services and how to access them.

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## ***SPECIAL EDUCATION***

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Minister for Health consider an incentive program to encourage allied health professionals to come to rural and remote areas.”**

Children benefit the greatest from early intervention. To give one example, a speech issue is usually identified at preschool. Parents are then referred to the relevant therapist at a local allied health services, however there is an increasing gap and turnover of health professionals in small towns, therefore parents may need to travel over 300 kms one way to access a speech therapist or occupational therapist. ICPA-NSW therefore requests that more incentives be offered to allied health professionals to work in rural and remote localities.

**RECOMMENDATION: That Universities providing teacher training include a standalone mandatory unit on Autistic Spectrum Disorders in the curriculum.**

With the alarming rate of increase in the diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) the chance of a newly graduated teacher having a student with ASD in their class is significant, therefore knowing how to manage this condition with an appropriate level of skills and knowledge in behaviour management strategies for ASD would provide beneficial outcomes for all students in the class.

Educating teachers at the undergraduate level would be more cost effective than having to provide post graduate training during the first few years of teaching. This could also reduce the

amount of time teachers need to take out of the classroom for Professional Development (PD). In some rural areas teachers are simply unable to take time out for such training because there is a lack of relief teachers available to allow for this, or they are required to travel considerable distance to attend training workshops which is often not an option for them.

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## ***TERTIARY***

### ***Video Conferencing***

**RECOMMENDATION: That the NSW Department of Education investigate alternative delivery modes to video conferencing at small rural TAFE campuses.**

TAFE in rural towns offer some courses by video conference. This method alone does not suit the learning style of many students.

In order for courses to run they require a larger number of students but that is not always possible in smaller populated places.

Face-to-face teaching or greater interaction with a teacher present in the classroom would be preferred.

### ***Certificate III “Education Support”***

**RECOMMENDATION: That ICPA-NSW commend the Certificate III Education Support course conducted by TAFE NSW**

This course was offered for the first time in 2019 and is open for applications through TAFE Bourke Connected Learning Centre.

The course caters to the needs of the national requirements for home tutors, student learning support staff and TAFE education support officers.

### ***Country Universities Centres (CUC)***

**RECOMMENDATION: ICPA-NSW thanks the Minister for Regional NSW and Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education for providing funding to expand CUC's to new locations in NSW**

The NSW Government has provided funding to establish centres in country locations including Cooma, Broken Hill, Narrabri, Moree, Griffith, Grafton and Leeton to support university students who wish to have opportunities for tertiary study while remaining in their local communities.

The Australian Government has co-contributed to this NSW Government investment to enhance this expansion.

The number of students studying through this model are well beyond target and generating academic success beyond campus only study.

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