

ICPA NT State Conference and AGM
Thu 29 Feb 2024
ALICE SPRINGS

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ICPA NT 2024 State Conference

19 Motions

[Special Needs](#) - 1 motion

[Early Childhood](#) - 1 motion

[Tertiary & Training](#) - 0 motions

[Allowances & Boarding](#) - 8 motions

[Distance Education & Communications](#) - 6 motions

[Special Needs](#) - 1 motion

[Miscellaneous](#) - 3 motions

Special Needs

1. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT requests that the Dept of Education and the Dept of Health provide targeted support to 'Special Needs Teachers' at Schools of the Air. To better educate and support Home Tutors and families of students who are Geographically Isolated and have recognised additional needs.

Explanation:

In recent years NT Government have introduced "Special Needs Teachers' into Public Schools, which has certainly improved support for enrolled students and their families. There is still a gap for remote and Geographically Isolated students.

Most geographically isolated parents and Home Tutors of students with learning difficulties are not trained teachers. Their role is to assist the student with their learning, supporting the School of the Air curriculum.

The key areas that need attention are,

- *Long waiting times for student assessments, due to lack of staffing in the education Department in remote towns of Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.*
- *Limited access to online, or face-to-face support and training, for the Home Tutor. Due to waiting times on assessments and lack of skilled staff in Dept of Education and Dept of Health, who support the "Special Needs Teacher" in a Distance Ed context.*
- *Easier access to Tele-health options for children living in Geographically Isolated areas.*

It is so important that families and Home Tutors can be armed with the right tools to educate students with learning difficulties in Geographically Isolated areas. An ongoing support network, online training and school patrols to remote areas are a lifeline to the student, home tutor and parents.

Allowances & Boarding

2. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT requests the Department of Education annually review the Student Assistance Boarding Allowance, including the zone methodology and allowance amounts, to ensure all geographically isolated boarding students are adequately and fairly financially supported to complete their compulsory schooling.

Explanation:

The NT Student Assistance Boarding Allowances (Intrastate & Interstate) must adequately support families of isolated Territory students completing their compulsory secondary education through boarding. The NT Education Act states that access to education must be free, yet the cost of educating geographically isolated students through boarding, which is the only option for many students, is a huge and often overwhelming expense for families to cover. The Dept of Education

have refined the Allowance to subsidise both the cost of education, and any travel to and from their place of study, and they have an obligation to ensure this subsidy aligns with cost of living increases. Each year, the boarding fees, uniforms, equipment, and travel expenses increase, and the NT Student Assistance Boarding Allowances must reflect this. The Zone Methodology must be equitable – it must reflect distance and difficulty in travel, and support itinerant working families that do not have a permanent fixed address due to varied worksites throughout the school year.

3. Alice Springs Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT lobbies the NT Department of Education for an increase in all allowances within the Student Assistance Scheme, including the kilometre travel rate, to more closely reflect the real cost of travel and the actual distance families must travel in kilometres instead of the radius travelled & zone restrictions which is currently being used, especially in light of the number of kilometres our members travel on dirt roads to access education.

Explanation:

For many of our members, a trip to town to attend an In-School event can include hundreds of kilometres of dirt roads.

Family 1: Family resides 350 km from Alice Springs. A one way trip to Alice Springs takes them 4 hours in travel due to having to travel 100km on unsealed dirt roads.

During one in-school trip they use approx 160 litres of diesel to travel from their residence to Alice Springs, daily school drop offs/pick ups then return home.

Going by current diesel rates of \$2.20 a litre, one in school event costs the family approx \$350 in fuel alone. They attend four in-school events a year which is a cost of \$1,400 in diesel. Using the Northern Territory Government radius map to determine the families' zones they fall into Zone 2 151-250 km which means they are eligible for \$1,660 annually for distance education allowance. If the family was considered to be Zone 3 251+km they would be eligible for an additional \$380 annually. The radius map used to determine a family's Zone should be based on actual KM travelled and not a radius map.

Family 2: This family has to travel 200 km one way to attend Alice Springs School of Air events but the way the zones were designed falls into the 150km radius therefore not receiving the actual allowance for kilometres travelled.


4. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT requests the NT Student Assistance Scheme includes all students eligible for the Federal Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme - under the '*Isolated Conditions - No reasonable Access to School*' Clause, where families are required to work onsite at various geographically isolated locations throughout the school year preventing them from being able to enrol in a conventional public school.


Explanation:

Currently contracting families that are travelling around the NT to service Geographically Isolated areas, where their child does not have access to school for more than 100 days (as per AIC Guidelines), or 20 days as per Katherine School of the Air Requirements, have no provision for assistance under the NT Student Assistance Scheme. These families are vital to providing skilled labour and services to remote areas, and should have support to educate their children like all geographically isolated NT Students.



GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED

For over 57 years, Katherine School of the Air has provided exceptional distance education to families residing in remote areas. The programs are designed for students in the home classroom from Preschool through to Year 9.



Eligibility

- Remote residents living in the top half of the NT and along the WA board

Meet one of the below criteria:

- 56kms from the nearest government school, or
- 4.5km to the nearest transport to a government school and 16km to the school via the shortest route, or
- No reasonable access to a government school for at least 20 days of the school year

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5. Alice Springs Branch:

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT requests that the Department of Education offer training sessions for all Northern Territory based subsidies available for Geographically Isolated students and families enrolled in schools of distance education.

Explanation:

Many GI families are unaware of the funding available to them and how to apply for this funding. Families have found this process very confusing and overwhelming which results in less people applying and a lot of families missing out on funds that would potentially assist their children with their education needs each year. We suggest that an annual session (during an In-School week, presented by NTG Student Assistance Scheme staff) be held where parents can be informed, ask questions, and even apply together to aid families seeking assistance.

6. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT encourages the NT Education Department to continually improve the Student Assistance Scheme application, re-application and processing systems and ensure the scheme subsidies and assistance is appropriate to the needs of isolated students.

Explanation:

ICPA NT acknowledges the Grants NT online platform is a significant improvement, however, ICPA members continue to have issues with the Student Assistance Office in relation to applications, re-applying in subsequent years, and changes of circumstances during the school year.

Solving systemic problems would not only alleviate stress for applicants but would also enable efficiency of the Student Assistance Office through a reduction in the number of queries and disagreements. The Student Assistance Scheme must be current and in line with the needs of users, cost of living, and currently, in comparison with other States, the Territory is falling short of coming anywhere near actual costs.

7. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT requests that the Department of Education extend the Back to School voucher scheme to all Northern Territory Geographically Isolated Students that are required to Board Interstate to complete their compulsory schooling.

Explanation:

Currently, the Department of Education offer a Back to School voucher to NT students either

- enrolled in a Northern Territory (NT) school or*
- registered for home-schooling as described*

*“You are entitled to receive **\$200 of educational goods and services for each child enrolled in a government or non-government NT school or preschool.** If your child is in transition to year 12, you will receive the entitlement in term 1 each year. The entitlement must be used by the end of term 1.”*

We request that due to the need for some Geographically Isolated students to board interstate, the Department of Education should extend this program by way of a Back-to-School Voucher Allowance. These children are still Northern Territory residents, and they are slipping through the net of support by way of exclusion. They cannot access financial support for back-to-school items in the state they are being educated in.

8. Alice Springs Branch

Carried/Lost

That NT ICPA requests that the Department of Education review the current policy that guides Schools of Distance Education for the “Back to School Voucher” scheme, to allow more flexibility for Geographically isolated families enrolled in schools of Distance Education to purchase what is needed for their remote classrooms.

Explanation:

Our Branch wishes to express gratitude for the increase from \$150 to \$200 for the back to school voucher scheme (BTSVS).

Our Branch would also like to ask that the Department consider the individual needs of each family who has access to this scheme through schools such as Alice Springs School of the Air.

Branch members appreciate that the School Council can add items to the BTSVS, however, it is not clear whether the schools are guided / limited by the Department of Education or the requests of the families. Either way, we are asking that more flexibility be granted to ensure Geographically Isolated families who have several out of pocket expenses (that are not shared by families that attend a face to face school, remote or urban) be explored and adopted to help cover other costs such as: setting up a learning space (classroom) and everything that this encompasses, sporting and sports equipment, excursions & excursion items (currently you can only use 1 voucher per child)

Family 1: Has 2 children in their mobile school room and the family travel hundreds of kilometres around the Northern Territory delivering an essential service. Their school room is unique & is a shipping container on top of a semi trailer converted into a mobile school room. As this school room endures a lot of miles on bumpy dirt roads ever year, new cupboards, plastic containers, chairs etc need to be replaced or installed again as they do not withstand the constant movement. The BTSVS would assist in maintaining this school room each year and not leave the family out of pocket.

Family 2: Has 3 children in the school room and a total sum of \$600 for the back to school voucher 2024. This family has ample supplies of paper, ink and school uniforms etc. (all currently offered on the BTSVS) This family however would benefit from an extra desk and chair to set up a learning space to help accommodate the 3 children and the home tutor. These items are not available to be purchased with the BTSVS.

9. Alice Springs Branch:

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT lobbies the NT department of Education to provide student assistance scheme funding via an enrolment base model rather than state based model.

Explanation:

We currently have students enrolled with Alice Springs School of Air (ASSOA) that reside interstate as ASSOA is their closest school. They are not eligible for student assistance scheme funding as they do not reside in the Northern Territory. They are also not eligible for South Australia funding as they don't attend school in South Australia, so they fall into a gap where they are not eligible for any funding assistance.

Case Study 1: A family who currently has 2 children at ASSOA lives just through a state border. Despite being interstate, ASSOA is their closest physical school for distance education, with the School of the Air in their state being nearly an extra 100 km further to travel to. This family has a 1240 km round trip to Alice Springs for In-school weeks, at an approximate cost of \$380 (with fuel at \$2.20/L) to attend each In-school. Over a year, this equates to \$1520 worth of costs to attend school that this family does not receive any assistance for. This family is entering their 9th year on ASSOA, so have so far spent approximately \$12,160 on accessing school-organised events with no assistance. Despite this family being unable to apply for assistance through the SAS, they ARE able to apply for the Back to School vouchers, which are based on enrolment. If BTS vouchers are based on enrolment, why is SAS eligibility not also based on enrolment?

Distance Education & Communications

10. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT ensures the NT Department of Education subsidises the full amount of school room internet to families, and remains a key participant and advisor to the Department of Education regarding the provision required for distance education.

Explanation:

As all Katherine School of the Air students have now transitioned to private internet providers in their home schoolrooms, it is imperative that families are able to afford adequate internet packages for their student's needs. The NT Education Act states that access to a public education must be free, and for Distance Education Students, access to reliable internet is crucial to enabling delivery of a standard public school education. The cost of schoolroom internet must be met by the Territory Government. Every classroom is unique, and families need flexibility to find the most appropriate internet solution for their situation.

11. Alice Springs Branch:

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT direct the Minister for Education and NT Government to ensure that Schools of Distance Education are funded appropriately for permanent and adequate Information & Communication Technology (ICT) positions within each School of Distance Education.

Explanation:

We would like to acknowledge that AFAIK, NTG's current funding model, puts the freedom of choice on the Schools for how they distribute funding for staffing positions. Schools aren't dictated on how much of their budget can be spent on administrative positions including Information & Communication Technology Coordinator (ICTC) vs teaching positions.

We would like to draw attention to the fact that Schools of Distance Education (SDE) rely heavily on ICTC positions within the school to ensure the delivery of remote education is seamless.

Schools of Distance Education, such as Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA) are becoming more reliant on technology to deliver content from the School and also from the varied locations of Teachers, into remote classrooms, over the years we have noted these changes: We have been almost entirely reliant on technology in general for at least the last decade. Satellite internet, online lessons, digital content / media and telephone communication have been integral to our school's operation for over fifteen years. However, in the last three to five years many systems have become centralised into the cloud, which places a significantly higher reliance on those cloud systems being accessible and functioning correctly. Earlier than five years ago, if a student's classroom computer went offline, there were still ways and means that they could continue their education while waiting for a resolution to their issue. These days, so much of a student's access to education requires stable, high-speed connectivity to the cloud that should a computer fail to boot, an account get locked out, or the internet connection drop, that student's education grinds to an almost complete standstill until the issue is resolved, sometimes causing the student to miss critical lessons or deadlines.

This has increased and highlighted the need for skilled staff to fulfill the ICT positions - access to ICTC staff when needed is imperative. Additional funding is always welcomed, especially as we have identified how reliant SDE has become on internet connectivity to deliver lessons into the remote classrooms.

More funding means the opportunity for not just more staff but also more training for existing staff, better equipment for staff and students, and more possibilities for new technologies and systems to enhance student learning.

ASSOA have commented that 2x full-time ICTCs is sufficient for their current school size.

We want to ensure that in the future, as dependency continues to lean on ICTC positions, that funding is not cut elsewhere to fund the critical ICTC positions. An increase of funds, either dedicated to ICTC, or staff in general would allow for adequate funding allocation across the board. Potential funding model changes could be investigated; 1) Schools are provided certain funding that is explicitly for ICTC positions. 2) That funding given to schools for staffing in general be increased such that there is more staff funding available and thus it is more conducive or viable to employ

additional administrative and ICTC staff without compromising on teaching staff funding (but still leaving it to the school to choose how to distribute those funds)

What are the Department of Education doing to ensure that Distance Education ICT's are provided with the tools and success they need to effectively support their students who are spread over a wide variety of locations (and with varied internet connections) with school provided devices?

What measures are the Department of Education taking to ensure NT systems are more robust to protect against simple issues that can cause unnecessary and unplanned outages?

Eg: an out of date data-base (July 2023) that referenced incorrect Geo-Locations of a range of I.P addresses. This led to days of missed lessons by many ASSOA students and to compound the issue, ICT's at ASSOA did not have full access to rectify the issue despite knowing how to and notifying the Department. This is a good example of the second big issue with the current DCDD / Help Desk system currently in place. As has been mentioned, there are definitely many systems that ICTCs need access to that we don't have access to anymore. There are also systems that don't make sense for ICTCs to have to manage. These systems legitimately should be the responsibility of DoE/DCDD. The geolocation database for Starlink IP addresses is an example of a system that should be the responsibility of DoE/DCDD. However, the processes and procedures that are in place to support ICTCs when there is an issue relating to one of the corporate systems are currently entirely inadequate. This was evidenced clearly with the Starlink IP geo issue, where the issue was identified and clearly communicated to the Help Desk, but then got lost in broken support systems and poor communication channels. In the end, it was many days before this high severity issue was resolved (via a workaround). There are many other instances where inadequate support, broken or delayed communications, and convoluted procedures have had direct, significant, detrimental impacts on student's education.

12. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT continues to relay the importance of Northern Territory Schools of the Air to all relevant Ministers and Government departments.

Explanation:

Assurance that Katherine and Alice Springs Schools of the Air in the Territory remain an imperative and supported part of our distance education sector by the NT Government is paramount. We cannot allow the NT Govt to under value the importance of these schools to our remote students, such as the devastating decision subsequently reversed, by the WA government to close its valuable Schools of the Air due to funding cuts a few years ago. Territory families need to be supported and feel secure that their children can access an appropriate education, which cannot be provided by centralised city-based distance education institutions.

13. Alice Springs Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT works with and encourages NBN to continue exploring low latency internet connection options for students enrolled and studying at schools of distance education.

Explanation:

Low latency internet greatly increases the quality of videoconferencing and removes some of the barriers and frustrations that come from trying to do video-conferencing over a high-latency connection (e.g. geostationary orbit satellite). The Katherine and Alice Springs Schools of the Air rely heavily on videoconferencing for delivery of their services and content.

Low latency internet is the norm these days, and with recent advances in technology (availability and affordability) it is highly achievable even in the remotest areas of the Northern Territory. We believe our remote students should have access to this technology for the sake of equity in their education compared to other public school students in the Territory.

It is imperative that internet connections that students have access to in their remote classrooms have the capabilities to match the quality of internet provided by the NT Government to the Schools of Distance Education that deliver their daily lessons.

As written on the NBN website:

"Your experience, including the speeds actually achieved over the nbn network, depends on the nbn access technology and configuration over which services are delivered to your premises, whether you are using the internet during the busy period, and some factors outside of nbn's control (like your equipment quality, software, chosen broadband plan or how your provider designs its network). For nbn Fixed Wireless, speeds may also be impacted by the number of concurrent users on the nbn Fixed Wireless network, including during busy periods. For nbn Satellite, end customers may also experience latency."

14. Alice Springs Branch**Carried/Lost**

That NT ICPA requests that the Northern Territory Department of Education partner with internet providers (such as NBN) to ensure educational connections are available to Schools of Distance Education.

Explanation:

It came to light at the 2023 Federal Conference held in Darwin, that the Northern Territory (Department of Education) was not listed as having a partnership with NBN in regards to internet connections for schools of distance education. This information was printed on a handout at the NBN stall that listed all other states and Territories except the NT.

The Alice Springs Branch would like to urge that the Northern Territory Department of Education work with RSPs such as NBN to ensure engagement of schools, education authorities and partnering is acted upon.

Families with children enrolled in schools of distance education need to have options on the RSP that suits their needs and that the RSP be supported by the school ICT and the NT Government Departments that govern the Schools of Distance Education.

15. Alice Springs Branch

Carried/Lost

That NT ICPA lobbies the Department of Education to provide remuneration to families with students enrolled in Schools of Distance Education to cover monthly costs incurred with portable internet connections.

Explanation:

Families are calling upon the NT Government and Education Department to realise that fixed internet connections do not suit all students who are enrolled and studying via schools of distance education.

The costs associated with portable internet connections leave families out of pocket when applying for remuneration for internet services. We would like to give these families the option to obtain affordable, portable internet solutions that are comparable to fixed internet options.

We would like to ask that the NT Government express to all Retail Service Providers the importance of offering this service as a priority to deliver education to some of the most geographically isolated students in the NT.

Early Childhood

16. Alice Springs Branch:

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT lobbies the relevant NT Government Departments to ensure registered Early Childhood Services operating in the Central Australian region are financially supported to implement their program into the geographically isolated areas of Central Australia, which are not receiving such services.

Explanation:

We acknowledge and are grateful that there have been some conversations in relation to early childhood in Central Australia and would like an update as to future plans for our region. To date, in early 2024 the Central Australian region still does not have regular access to early childhood services that are being funded by the NT Government. Early Childhood is a vital tool in all children's development, along with being a foundation for learning, it's how they build confidence, interact with others, and learn important social and emotional skills. It's also an opportunity for parents to come together, share stories, and support one another.

Tertiary & Training

No new motions for 2024

Miscellaneous

17. Katherine Branch

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT implores the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to increase maintenance of roads to ensure safe conditions for families travelling to attend for educational purposes and school staff.

Explanation:

Many Families need to travel vast distances over NT Roads to attend to the educational needs of their children, and there is concern over funding not being available for adequate road maintenance.

Case Study: The current maintenance program on the Central Arnhem Road cannot keep up with the high volume of heavy vehicles/road trains using the road to access Nhulunbuy, cattle stations, communities, and mining exploration sites, leaving the road in an unsafe condition only weeks after a maintenance grade. This affects families when the road becomes so poor that they need to consider whether their children can attend a school contact event or assessment, or travel to collect or return school resources or unit work. If the road is deemed to be in an unacceptable state for Department of Education Teachers to travel, or a longer travel time is needed due to road conditions, there can be a delay or school patrols can be cancelled, leaving students without the valuable contact time with teaching staff.

18. NT State Council

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT make urgent appeals to relevant Ministers and Senators of the absolute importance of the need for the speedy installation and activation of the Tennant Creek BOM Radar.

Explanation:

The lack of reliable weather information is unacceptable in this day and age. There is nothing on the BOM radar to say that the Tennant Creek radar is not functioning and thus people could be making travel plans relying on potentially dangerous and misleading information. The Tennant Creek radar covers an area of the main arterial highways and access across the NT (Stuart and Barkly). These are key routes used to take children back to boarding school, travel for home tutors to their place of work and for families to in-school events. The cutting of the Highway in January this year due to flood damage, is just one recent example. During these times, if you were relying just on the weather radar, it was indicating that there was no (or minimal) rain occurring in these catchments.

During the devastating bushfires of the Tennant Creek and Barkly region, in Sep, Oct, Nov 2023, fire fighters had no weather station to guide them in their response. Many small rural schools and isolated classrooms were affected by this footprint with real and potential impact.

The weather radar was planned to be turned off in 2012, but after protests it received funding until June 2015 when it was eventually shut down. In 2019, a new Doppler weather radar received \$15.4 million from the Australian government and \$2.4 million from NTG. It was expected to be operational in 2021 as an initiative under the Barkly Regional Deal. This has still not happened. We have been informed that the current delay is due to land-use approvals on the selected site.

19. Alice Springs Branch:

Carried/Lost

That ICPA NT be acknowledged and congratulated in their ongoing efforts throughout the year in attending delegations and lobbying Government on our behalf for a brighter future for our children in rural and remote Australia.

Explanation:

NT State councillors spend many countless volunteer hours following up on the motions that we submit each year at their NT State Conferences, providing guidance to Branch Executive, Committee and Members, providing feedback on motions from previous conferences. We would like to thank them for continually making themselves available to members and helping with a number of issues that arise at Branch Level and ensuring that our motions will get a voice at the table when the opportunity arises.