

# DISTANCE EDUCATION

## A 9. SPRINGSURE/ROLLESTON BRANCH

**“That ICPA Qld Inc. continue lobbying DoE and the Qld Government to ensure that Geographically Isolated children’s needs are not overlooked by the schools of Distance Education.”**

### Explanation

Geographically Isolated children’s educational needs are at risk of being overlooked by the Schools of Distance Education as ‘by choice’, medical and ‘single subject’ enrolments escalate. Currently one of the Distance Education School campuses has over 6 times more part time students (>4000) than full time students (>600). Geographically Isolated students who do not have access to daily face-to-face schooling should be prioritised within Distance Education in terms of resources, space and support.

**Carried**

## A 10. CAPRICORNIA BOTA

**“That the ICPA continue to promote the invaluable role the Home Tutor plays within the Distance Education system to the DOE & SDE principals.”**

### Explanation:

To protect the important role that a well-informed/professionally developed, engaged and fully invested Home Tutor plays in the education of children in the distance education setting.

**Carried**

## A 11. CAPRICORNIA BOTA

**“That ICPA continue to lobby the DOE to ensure that in-service activities (minischools) & field service activities (clusters) continue to be provided by SDE’s.”**

### Explanation:

The impact that isolation and social distancing has had across the world during the 2020 pandemic has highlighted the importance of social connectedness. Therefore, moving forward it is critical that the DOE are reminded of how vitally important events such as mini schools and clusters are to children living in isolated areas. These activities are a fundamental requirement for isolated children to develop social skills, sense of belonging to a school community and to engage with teachers and peers in a school setting.

**Carried**

## A 12. SPRINGSURE/ROLLESTON BRANCH

**“That ICPA Qld Inc. emphasise to the DoE the importance of property clusters for Geographically Isolated (GI) children and their teachers.”**



**Explanation:**

Property clusters are extremely beneficial to both students and the Distance Education teaching community as this gives teachers the opportunity to interact with their students within their own environment. Teachers within Distance Education have an extraordinary role within the education system and this helps them to understand the barriers that their students face on a daily basis as well as offering them a once in a lifetime experience!

**Carried**

**A 13. SPRINGSURE/ROLLESTON BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld Inc. emphasise to the DoE the importance of GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED (GI) children experiencing face-to-face contact with their peers and teachers in more ways than just the regular classroom environment.”**

**Explanation:**

It is important for Geographically Isolated (GI) children to be able to experience face to face contact with their teachers and classmates during mini-school and property clusters. They need to know how to interact with their peers, learn how to play sport and interact with the greater community. These afterschool activities are everyday occurrences for children living in an urban community and it is important that GI students are given the same opportunities wherever possible. These opportunities were incorporated into mini-schools in the past.

**Carried**

**A 14. ALPHA BRANCH**

**“That ICPA QLD lobby the Department of Education and the Minister of Education to ensure Schools of Distance Education maintain their flexible curriculum delivery mode and support students and families who choose to complete part or all of their schooling offline.”**

**Explanation:**

It is essential that Schools of Distance Education provide their students the flexibility to complete part or all of their curriculum offline, and allow families to find the balance that provides the best possible learning outcomes for their child. For many students spending multiple hours online per day is not an effective learning environment. Schools of Distance Education should ensure that students are provided with digital materials that can be printed if the families choose this line of delivery, and ensure that families are aware that this option exists. Schools of Distance Education should not in any way make families feel that offline delivery is not an available option.

**Carried**

**A 15. CAPRICORNIA BOTA**

**“That ICPA lobby the Department of Education to make sure that online delivery at Distance Education schools does not become the only delivery method available.”**

**Explanation:**

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Online delivery of individual subjects does not work for every family. Home tutors are well informed, engaged and fully invested in their student's education and should be supported with adequate resources if they choose to deliver a subject themselves.

**Carried**

### **A 16. MOUNT ISA BRANCH OF THE AIR**

**“That ICPA Qld seek assurance from the Department of Education that papers and resources required by distance education families be developed and received in a timely manner.”**

#### **Explanation:**

Distance Education families are heavily reliant on the resources and materials provided by their schools in order to educate their children. Curriculum development needs to be completed and materials sent out/made available to families well in advance of the day that the items are actually needed by the student in the classroom. We are grateful that some Schools of Distance Education/Schools of the Air still support families with print materials when they are required for learning however product development timelines for new curriculum need to be evaluated and considerate of the length of time that print material can take to be delivered to students in more remote locations to ensure all distance education students have their learning materials in time for their lessons and home tutors have adequate time to prepare for lessons.

*(Example – To Be Added)*

**Carried**

### **A 17. CLERMONT BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobby the Department of Education to provide an online teaching platform for state distance education lessons with functionality equal to or better than the former Blackboard Collaborate platform. “**

#### **Explanation**

In mid-2020, the Blackboard Collaborate program which has been used for distance education lessons for a number of years was replaced with Blackboard Ultra. Blackboard Ultra has less functionality than the previous platform, making online lessons less collaborative, manageable, engaging and user-friendly. Whereas previously students were able to work on the screen for the teacher to see their work, provide feedback and give support and guidance in real time, the Ultra platform has reduced the opportunity for this to occur. It was indicated that Ultra was only an interim measure until such time as an adequate replacement was found, however at this time no improved service which provides a more positive learning experience for distance education students has been forthcoming. There are many other platforms available for online conferencing and collaboration and we would like the Department to promptly provide a platform which gives distance education students the best possible online learning experience. It is disappointing that with some much advancement in this space, especially in the last twelve months, that Queensland distance education students have been forced to take a backwards step in the provision of their education.

**Carried**

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## A 18. MOUNT ISA BRANCH OF THE AIR

**“That ICPA Qld Inc. request that the Department of Education ensures any new distance education online teaching/learning platform or change of platform be thoroughly investigated, proven to be working well and school families receive support, before these changes are implemented.”**

### **Explanation:**

The delivery of distance education is becoming increasingly reliant on online teaching and learning. In order for online educational experiences to be effective, it is essential that the online platform used to deliver the lessons is user friendly, easily accessible and that support is provided for students and families as they navigate the lessons. The Department of Education needs to ensure that the implementation of a new platform has been thoroughly investigated to ensure it is appropriate for use by families and that adequate training and support is provided to ensure students and families are able to use the platform without hesitation or glitches.

**Carried**

## A 19. CAPRICORNIA BOTTA

**“That ICPA lobby the DOE to provide findings, recommendations and progress of various reviews carried out to assess the facility needs of Distance Education Schools into the future.”**

### **Explanation:**

There have been a number of reviews conducted by DOE to assess the futuristic needs of SDE facilities but very little accountability, transparency & feedback provided to interested parties in relation to the long-term plan for facility upgrades. Consultation with end users is critical to ensure that the complexities experienced by the DE delivery model are taken into consideration to assist in providing equitable education outcomes for rural and remote learners.

**Carried**

## A 20. ALPHA BRANCH

**“That ICPA QLD lobby the Department of Education and the Minister of Education to ensure Schools of Distance Education P & C’s with onsite camping facilities, are immediately supplied (in writing) with a complete list of any fire, health, safety or COVID regulations that are currently preventing each SDE from accessing purposely built camping facilities.”**

### **Explanation:**

Alpha Branch has provided an extensive table of a timeline of events to QLD ICPA that demonstrate the steps that CSDE P & C has gone to in an attempt to try and resolve these issues with no success. The issue needs to be rectified immediately, the red tape departmental blockade and excuses need to stop, and discussion needs to be transparent and open with those involved, so that families can get back to using these purpose-built facilities.

No SDE family should be penalised from accessing educational, social and emotional support, because of their location, postcode or bank balance. The restriction of access to P & C built facilities is placing families at more of a safety risk than the use of the facilities which, to the best of our branch’s knowledge, meet all required COVID, health, fire and safety regulations. These buildings were not designed, fundraised for or intended to be used as classroom facilities, however this is exactly what is occurring, at the expense of SDE

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students, with red tape barriers being used as an excuse to block access. As stated in the February edition of News & Views, the Minister said that “the Government remains committed to providing a great education to children, no matter where they live,” we implore State Council to ensure that the Minister is fully aware and understands the implications of removing access to camping facilities for geographically isolated distance education students.

**Carried**

**A 21. ALPHA BRANCH**

**“That ICPA QLD strongly lobby the Queensland Minister of Education, to urgently allow onsite camping (that meets existing health, safety and COVID regulations) in P & C funded, purpose-built facilities at schools of distance education (SDE), to enable full utilisation by geographically isolated SDE families as they have in the past, and as was intended when these facilities were funded and built by the families that use them.”**

**Explanation:**

Our motion reflects the urgent need for the Education Minister to allow purpose-built camping and catering buildings to be utilised as intended, to support the social, emotional, educational and financial needs of SDE students and their families.

During the extraordinary times of the COVID pandemic, SDE families were understanding of the restrictions put in place by Education Queensland. However, now that restrictions have been removed for other facilities such as school camps and all schools are operating at Response Level 1, it is our view that SDE catering and accommodation should be allowed again. The SDE’s have no issue in having to meet the current respective COVID or health and safety requirements, and this needs to stop being used as an excuse as to why students and families cannot access these buildings.

This situation is not just occurring at CSDE, with other SDE’s across QLD also being told they cannot access purpose-built buildings that in many cases were paid for by the families using them. These buildings were custom built, with significant investment and fundraising from SDE families, to enable an affordable facility for both catering and camping during school events, such as minischools. They have become an integral component of attending an SDE, where students who would normally not be able to interact face to face with peers, can come together and develop social skills and friendships. They also provide a place for isolated families to receive friendship, support and guidance as they navigate often difficult and remote parenting in isolated areas.

The facilities have filled a void in affordable camping for families who have been experiencing ongoing costs associated with drought and personal hardship. Accommodation, particularly during the tourist season, in these larger regional centres, comes at a premium cost and thus it is our fear that families prevented from accessing affordable accommodation will stop attending SDE events altogether, with significant mental health implications. A decision that no SDE family should have to make, when there are viable and affordable facilities being blocked by Education Queensland.

Children and families will be more at risk with cases of families having to source accommodation in motels, shared mining facilities, caravan parks and hostels, which pose additional safety risks and expenses.

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In the February edition of News & Views the Minister assured branches that student well-being remains paramount, consequently the Minister should be reviewing the decision to block access to SDE accommodation facilities immediately to ensure the well-being of these SDE students and families is prioritised.

**Carried**

## **A 22. CLERMONT BRANCH**

**“That ICPA QLD Inc lobby the Department of Education and the Minister for Education to immediately reverse the decision to not allow onsite camping facilities at schools of distance education so geographically isolated students and their families can use the facilities as intended under the previous joint arrangements families had with schools and the department.”**

### **Explanation:**

The Department of Education Queensland (at a regional, state and ministerial level) has made the decision to close the doors on facilities that have been a source to relieve the financial burden associated with mini schools. Most of all though, the environment enabled a special social and emotional fabric where children hundreds of kilometres from a normal play experience were given that chance, a norm for children who are not marginalised by distance. Our sheds and mini school experience that we had in Emerald gave a chance for bush mothers for connection, support and friendship that they don't otherwise have due to distance. Home tutors gained a place to connect, share and network. Overnight, community living for that short time enabled this.

For over two decades we built two sheds that could accommodate most of the geographically isolated enrolments at Emerald. We target fundraised, teamed with the P and C with the support of the department on the use and need for it, the department was the guarantor on our loans, we raised the capital via grants, personal contributions and a loan. With no consultation as to the actual reason the doors are closed, now for a year and a half.

**Carried**

## **A 23. YARAKA ISISFORD BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld (Inc) lobby the State Minister for Education to allow on site or nearby affordable accommodation at geographically isolated Schools of Distance Education for families to attend mini schools and other school-based activities.”**

### **Explanation:**

Mini Schools are extremely important for geographically isolated Distance Education students.

This is often their only opportunity to interact with their peer group both socially and in a classroom situation. Being able to connect and network to break the day-to-day isolation of their lives is vitally important to the wellbeing and mental health of these children.

In the case of Longreach School of Distance education, on site hostel style accommodation has been available for students and families at nominal cost. Fifty percent of the initial cost of the building was raised by the school P&C Assoc and general community. Changes to Asbestos and fire safety rulings meant the building was deemed unsafe, but no solution or offers to upgrade or replace were forthcoming. Instead, Education Qld has stated that no accommodation will be allowed on school grounds.

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The stroke of a pen has left families with no option but to stay at expensive motels if the children are to attend mini school. The large influx of tourists into our region sees all available accommodation booked up for months. LSOE has indicated to EQ that the parents and community will fund raise to erect a new building, only requiring EQ to supply adjacent land. This request was refused.

Distance Education in rural and remote areas is unique and does not fit in the same box as mainstream schools and as such should not be in the “one size fits all” category but be given recognition within the EQ system of the very different needs such as on-site accommodation. The closure of these facilities is again a major step backwards in equity of education for geographically isolated students.

**Carried**

#### **A 24. SPRINGSURE/ROLLESTON BRANCH**

**“That ICPA QLD Inc. lobby the QLD Minister for Education to immediately identify and address the barriers faced by geographically Isolated Families in accessing purpose-built accommodation and catering facilities at Schools of Distance Education.”**

##### **Explanation:**

Some Distance Education schools have been prohibited the use of purposely built onsite accommodation funded and built by the P&C specifically to help families with accommodation throughout mini schools and overnight activities. We acknowledge Covid has played a role in the present circumstance, however the doors were locked shut PRIOR to this current pandemic and are still locked to this day. This overnight accommodation is important for these children and families to not only alleviate some of the financial burden but also to help with the ever-important bonding of the children. This important bonding, although available to students within a mainstream school or living in suburbia, unfortunately, not available to distance students. For many families, these mini schools are the only times that the children can play and associate with their classmates and teachers both within school hours and after. The uniqueness and often isolation of distance learning requires a strong support mechanism for parents and home tutors. The ability to be together during this time is of great benefit to the mental wellbeing and learning priorities these families must deal with and pass on to the children. Not being able to spend as much time together as possible throughout these mini schools is detrimental to the success of these children’s education. The Springsure/Rolleston Branch strongly advocate for a fair and deserving social and academic education for these already geographically, socially disadvantaged children and families. Every child deserves a great start to their education and having onsite overnight accommodation for families to utilise and access, is allowing these families to have just that.

**Carried**

#### **A 26. RICHMOND BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobby the Department of Education to ensure existing purpose built camping facilities on Schools of Distance Education campuses are made available when overnight stays are required for school events.”**

##### **Explanation:**

Families across a number of Schools of Distance Education have been prohibited from accessing their on-site, community funded, P&C built infrastructure since prior to 2017.

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Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic has certainly brought about a need for alternative arrangements for a period of time, this exclusion from purpose-built sheds for families who attend face to face education opportunities has been occurring well prior to its advent.

These facilities provide a critical link for students in facilitating the development of social and emotional skills of both geographically isolated and medically enrolled students at SDE's. The camping facilities also provide the families who choose to use them much needed support and can underpin the fabric of an SDE, bringing together staff, students, educators and families in a safe, supervised, familiar environment that is in alignment with several DoE Policies. SDE's who have worked hard to establish these facilities benefit greatly from the fruits of their labour and are often chosen by families depending on their circumstances to allow equitable access to critical face to face time between students and their teachers that meets their needs regardless of their individual circumstances.

**Carried**

#### **A 27. CLERMONT BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobby the Department of Education and Minister for Education to consult with distance education families to ensure sustainable, equivalent and suitable alternative camping and recreation options are available in place of current facilities while negotiations continue. “**

**Explanation to be finalised**

**Carried**

#### **A 28. BELYANDO / MT COOLON BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobby the Department of Education to enable School of Distance Education's to enter into formal arrangements with organisations who utilise onsite camping facilities.”**

##### **Explanation:**

Current policy exists within the “Community Use of School Facilities - Guidelines” that would allow SDE's to enter into mutually beneficial formal arrangements of the use of non-department funded, onsite camping facilities. These arrangements have the capacity to alleviate the DoE's concerns around usage liability and all relevant policies. This would allow geographically isolated families to resume the use of camping facilities on SDE sites.

By way of further explanation, the following information is an extract from this policy.

- **Joint Development Arrangement**
- *A Joint development agreement (JDA) is the appropriate document where the proposed community use involves capital works and requires the construction of new school facilities or the upgrade of existing school facilities and these are to be funded in whole or in part by a community user.*
- *An example of a JDA is the construction of lights on the school oval funded by a community sports group and for use by both the school and the community sports group.*
- *As complex legal and other issues will require negotiation (e.g. duration of agreement, ongoing management, maintenance, construction and financing), a JDA takes significant time to formalise.*
- *Each JDA will be different as they need to reflect the actual responsibilities and contributions agreed to by the parties.*
- *Advice from Legal and Administrative Law Branch (LALB) is required when developing and formalising a JDA. This is in addition to consultation and approval being required for the JDA from the regional*



infrastructure manager and regional director and Infrastructure Services Branch through the Infrastructure Programs and Delivery unit (as the unit in managing capital works delivery).

- A JDA proposal with a value **not exceeding** \$200,000 is managed and approved at regional level in consultation with the regional infrastructure manager, regional director and LALB.
- A JDA proposal with a value **greater than** \$200,000 requires approval by the Minister or Director-General or their delegates in consultation with Infrastructure Services Branch, regional director and LALB.
- The JDA must be developed by LALB and the principal does not have the delegated authority to enter into these arrangements.

## • Lease

- If you are contacted by a third party seeking to enter into a lease of school facilities, you must contact your regional infrastructure manager before making any in-principle agreements relating to the third-party use.
- A lease is the grant of a right of exclusive possession of State property such as a school facility, school land or any part of a school.
- If a lease is granted, the lessee will be entitled to exclusive possession of the leased premises during the term of the lease and obtains a proprietary interest in the leased premises.
- If a lease is granted, the State remains the owner of the leased premises however, unless written into the lease, the school is not entitled to enter, use or otherwise deal with the leased premises without the lessee's permission.
- A lease must be developed by LALB and requires approval by the Executive Director, Infrastructure Operations.
- The principal does not have the delegated authority to enter into these arrangements.

These arrangements provide the department with an opportunity to immediately initiate proceedings to help mitigate the social marginalisation geographically and medically isolated students have continued to suffer.

**Carried**

### S 5. CLARKE CREEK BRANCH

**“That ICPA (Qld) lobby DOE to put an immediate stop to repurposing family facilities that are used for overnight camping by families during Distance Education Mini-Schools.”**

**Carried**

### S. 6 CLARKE CREEK BRANCH

**“That ICPA (Qld) lobby relevant authorities to accept the CSDE application for new demountable buildings to be erected at the Rockhampton SDE campus as a matter of priority.”**

**Carried**

### S 7. LONGREACH BRANCH

**“That ICPA QLD Inc. lobbies Education Queensland to continue to allow on-site accommodation at schools of distance education to support the welfare of students, home tutors and families.”**

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## **Explanation:**

Longreach SODE (LSODE) onsite accommodation, known as the 'Quarters' was built by the P&C and school in 1984 when the need for onsite accommodation for isolated students travelling for field services was apparent. In 2016, student accommodation ceased as the building was not fire safety compliance for sleeping, however the kitchen, bathrooms and dining areas continue to be in full use. In 2020, the dormitories were converted to classrooms. The school and P&C have been working towards a solution to provide alternative accommodation for students since the closure of the dormitories.

During the last five years, impacts to student learning outcomes, connection and support for students and families as well as increased costs and challenges around access and availability to suitable accommodation for students, school administration, staff and families have been significant and is an example of what can happen when onsite accommodation is closed.

Field services such as minischools, clusters and camps, for LSODE and visiting schools allow face-to-face time with teachers and classmates. 80% of LSODE students are classified as geographically isolated, travelling up to 12 hours to attend school events and time spent learning with teachers and classmates invaluable supports student learning outcomes.

LSODE has a high percentage of new and young families with 76% of students in 2021 coming from families with one or two children at school, with most also having pre-school age children. These families are new to distance education and teaching students at home. In the past, we have been able to create a support network for these families, reducing the sense of isolation, connecting with others who share similar circumstances that need no explanation and who 'get you'. These connections were developed as people spent time together in the Quarters. Now we have families who know no one, dispersed through the community in commercial accommodation and the sense of isolation is real. Students reportedly miss the intensive time with peers which for many of our isolated students is the only time they will see other children or experience a 'sleep over' together.

Due to high costs for families and availability, the way that field services are delivered by the school has evolved to reduce the number of trips that families make to Longreach during the year. We can no longer ask families to travel to multiple individual year level minischools due to cost and accommodation availability instead choosing a single, whole school cluster each term. This impacts the amount of face-to-face time teachers have with students and the learning opportunities that can be delivered across the curriculum, with implications for school administration in scheduling events in limited timeframes.

Longreach has a significant tourism industry and there is a shortage of accommodation suitable for families. Only 52% of available rooms can accommodate more than four people and all require sharing of queen or double beds. Few options allow for self-catering which is challenging for families, logistically and financially. More domestic travellers because of COVID as well as road work gangs book a significant portion of available accommodation. Supply of accommodation cannot meet demand. In Term 1, 2021, 11% of families were on accommodation wait lists to attend the annual Home Tutor Workshop. In Term 2, families slept in caravans, camp trailers and tents, stayed with friends and family, or could not attend cluster because of a lack of accommodation. At this stage only, a small number of families having secured accommodation for Term 3 cluster as commercial accommodation is completely booked out.

A 2021 survey of LSODE families revealed accommodation, fuel and food costs for four nights for each school field event is costing up to \$1500 for a parent and three children. Costs are prohibitive for many families and combined with difficulties in finding suitable accommodation are significant issues. As a tourism centre accommodation prices continue to rise and this year long standing accommodation bookings by families have been lost or cancelled. There is a high emotional cost for families finding accommodation and a loss of control of circumstances.

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On-site accommodation is much more than a 'building'; it fosters essential connections and student learning and breaks down the barriers of social isolation improving wellbeing at whole school, student, and family levels.

Carried

### F3: JULIA CREEK BRANCH

**“That ICPA Qld request the Department of Education to research the long-term effects on children of regular, prolonged exposure to screens and technology devices, like audio headsets, such as is experienced by geographically isolated children learning via distance education.”**

Carried

### F4: CAPRICORNIA BOTA

**“That ICPA Qld lobby the DoE and Principals of Schools of Distance Education to work with school P&C’s to ensure that onsite accommodation facilities previously used by families when attending SDE’s for in-service activities such as minischools can continue to be used as they were previously, so long as the facilities meet all safety regulations in accordance with the appropriate Building Codes of Australia and the Building Fire Safety Regulations Act.”**

Carried

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