

COMMUNICATIONS

A 3. ALPHA BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobby the Department of Education for an increase to the ICT subsidy for geographically isolated students, to more adequately reflect the current costs of broadband connectivity in remote classrooms.”

Explanation:

Education Queensland provides an annual subsidy for geographically isolated students currently enrolled in an SDE of \$500 to assist with offsetting the costs of broadband internet access for the home classroom. This subsidy has not increased over the years as the demand for data and classroom connectivity expenses have grown. The average cost of a broadband connection to a SDE schoolroom is approximately \$85/month* (BIRRR Survey stats), leaving some families significantly out of pocket for broadband access, particularly when they have only one child in the schoolroom.

The SDE curriculum, materials and resources are predominantly accessed and delivered online, thus broadband connectivity is an essential service for SDE classrooms. The current ICT subsidy needs to more adequately reflect the costs of broadband.

CARRIED

A 4. DAWSON VALLEY BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld lobby the Department of Education to have trained local IT support personnel or funding available for small schools to buy support time to manage hardware and software issues that arise within the school environment.”

Explanation:

In some small rural P-10 schools, IT support is managed by a classroom teacher who has been provided with extra training to have an orange card level of access. Whilst this is appreciated, teacher transfers and class commitments mean that the class teacher/IT support person may not be able to provide consistent and ongoing support when most needed.

With online NAPLAN testing, the need for IT to be seamless is essential if rural students are to have the same access to this testing platform as their city counterparts who enjoy faster speeds and actively maintained computers and programs. An on the ground IT support person with a higher level of access is essential for this connectivity.

If there comes a time when students bring their own laptops/iPads to school, IT support staff with administration level access will be essential in ensuring students are able to access the programs they need both at school and at home.

An example of the feedback received from teachers is:

Teacher A: “In our small P-10 school we have one teacher with their Orange card. This teacher is our go-to person when things go wrong or when new computers need setting up. However, any support they give takes away from the time they can devote to their own teaching and preparation.”

Teacher B: “When we need to move issues to a higher level with software providers for example, we are

advised to take this up with our IT department. We are our IT department! Are small rural schools now expected to fundraise to access additional IT support when issues are beyond Orange card access or if the teacher is absent or transferred?"

Previously our school purchased one day per month of support time from a larger State School that is located one hour away. However, that IT person is now so busy with IT issues in the larger school that we are no longer able to access this support. The One School 1800 hotline is useful but wait times can be long which is exacerbated if issues need to be escalated to a higher-level service support technician. Although this assistance is useful, it takes up valuable teaching time. Could a workable solution be found for smaller cluster schools in our area to share a technician for example?

CARRIED

A 5. DAWSON VALLEY BRANCH

"That ICPA Qld continue lobbying the Department of Education to assist rural schools in having adequate bandwidth/internet speed to ensure the connectivity supports the digital capabilities required by our students to participate in all online lessons and programs."

Explanation:

Some small rural P-10 schools have observed difficulties using online lessons with much of the lesson time spent logging on.

We were heartened to hear on the 31st March 2022 that the Palaszczuk Government has committed to making internet speeds in every state school 40 times faster by the end of 2023, and 200 times faster in 2026.

In the meantime, however, teachers are struggling to teach certain aspects of the curriculum and our students are at risk of falling behind as a direct result of poor internet speeds.

Parents have also observed that students leaving small rural schools to further their education in larger centres are often at a disadvantage with their limited computer skills compared to city counterparts.

Examples of the feedback received from teachers:

Teacher A - "When I try to get my class logged onto the computers, the bandwidth does not support everyone logging in at the same. By the time everyone has logged on, it's time finish the lesson." Teacher B - "I try to avoid using the computers due to the time taken to get all students logged on and into the program. I'm not sure if this is a combination of internet speed, older computers or students not logging off properly from a time before. With limited access to technical support it's all very frustrating for both myself and the students."

Teacher C - "Internet connection is terrible and when things go wrong there is just no-one we can reach out to for help in rectifying! Every time we try to log in it takes half an hour and even then, not all students are logged in. I now allow twice the time it should take for a computer-based task and I feel guilty about wasting time."

Teacher D - "In Japanese the computers have glitches, they freeze, the writing goes fuzzy and the speech is out of sync with the language teacher so lip movements are not matching what is heard. If another class happens to log in at the same time or just before us, it takes at least 15 minutes to get everyone on. I'm starting to avoid using computers for other lessons and learning opportunities as it is not worth the time."

Teacher E - "If I have a student whom I want to use a computer-based program as an extension or further practise to the lesson, as an impromptu thing, it is not as easy as jumping onto a computer and starting. It

takes too long to log on and the moment is lost. I often give up and then feel that I have wasted valuable time and missed out on providing a specific learning opportunity.”

Teacher F - “If two classes are doing Japanese at the same time (this would be 30 students in total) the connection just continuously streams. I don’t know how our school would go if all students had a laptop and all lessons were on a device.”

Teacher G - “Last year the school paid for extra bandwidth or internet speed upgrades. It cost a significant sum and I don’ think it made any difference.”

CARRIED

A 7. NEBO BRANCH

“That ICPA Qld raise awareness to the relevant Communications and Government Departments of the mobile phone black spots throughout rural and remote Queensland, particularly on school bus runs.”

Many parts of rural and remote Queensland have limited, to no mobile phone coverage. We are seeking that Telstra identify all rural bus routes in Queensland that have black spots, and upgrade the coverage in their areas to ensure that all routes can be travelled with sufficient mobile coverage to ensure ongoing safety in case of emergency contact needed.

CARRIED