

## **PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL**

### **Rural and Remote Schools Report**

**Naomi Obst – Portfolio Holder, March 2022**

At the 2021 State Conference the following motion was presented:

*“That ICPA (WA) lobby the Minister for Education to ensure that services such as the mobile Dental Therapy Centre (DTC) are not rationalized purely due to school population”*

After two years of lobbying between the Department of Education and the Health Department, I am pleased to advise members that this motion from the Central Wheatbelt North Branch has been successful for the intended school of Kalannie. I thank the Kalannie community and the CWN Branch for their proactive, factual and punctual responses when requested for information. The Dental Therapy Centre van attended the Kalannie school in Term 4 of 2021.

Branches are encouraged to contact State Council if their schools are having similar issues so that the same outcome can hopefully be obtained. We have heard reports of school P&C’s being requested to fund facilities to enable the dental van to visit. This should not be the role of a P&C.

#### **FIONA NASH APPOINTMENT**

In December 2021, Fiona Nash was appointed by Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie, to be the first Regional Education Commissioner in Australia. Fiona’s appointment will oversee the implementation of recommendations from the National Regional, Rural & Remote Tertiary Education Strategy otherwise known as the Naphthine Review. Fiona has a deep love for regional Australia and a strong understanding of the education sector.

The primary role of the new Commissioner will be to bring a national focus and direction for regional and remote education and champion the educational needs of students in regional communities.

The Naphthine review identified country Australians are less than half as likely to obtain a university degree by the age of 35, compared to those in the city.

The Australian Government has committed \$6 million over four years to establish the role and to undertake a range of projects to significantly improve regional education outcomes by 2030.

(Ministers Media release 06-DEC-21)

Federally, ICPA has welcomed this appointment and looks forward to a successful working relationship with Fiona.

#### **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN TEACHER INCENTIVE**

The South Australian Education Department has announced a once-off “hard to fill” payment in an effort to try and attract teachers to schools that have teacher vacancies. Teachers would need to accept a two year contract to teach in a “hard to fill” country preschool, primary or secondary school with a \$20,000 incentive paid in two tranches. Recruiting teachers to fill country positions has been a long-running issue for the South Australian Education Department, despite already having teacher

incentives in place.

It will be interesting for WA to watch this space and see if this does improve the appointment and quality of teachers in rural and remote schools in South Australia.

### **COVID-19**

As the school holidays rapidly ended, parents of students in rural, remote and city schools remained unsure of what schools would look like in 2022. Less than a week before school started Minister for Education Hon. Sue Ellery launched a safe to school plan with the catchphrase *“Schools will be the first to open and the last to close”*. By the end of the first week six metropolitan schools had reported COVID-19 outbreaks sending many teachers, students and their families into two weeks of home isolation. The entire campus of one large school shut down for two weeks.

With the continuation of outbreaks in schools and the isolation requirement of 14 days causing total devastation to affected schools, a new *“close contact”* definition was implemented, cutting the isolation period from 14 days to 7 as well as a raft of other rules on mask wearing and contact times.

For our rural and remote schools, who largely at the time of writing are unaffected by COVID-19, these rules are also required to be implemented. Air filters have been placed in classrooms with poor air quality, doors are encouraged to remain open, parents are allowed on site but not into classrooms. Assemblies and parent interviews will go online and class group play areas established.

School camps have been cancelled, but school balls and sports carnivals can go ahead amongst many other rules.

The wearing of masks is required by any teacher who has been in the Perth district in the last 2 weeks, or if you teach in the Peel and Southwest regions. Mask wearing for students in the metropolitan area is compulsory and will extend to all schools and students down to Year 3 in the event of high caseloads.

Teachers in all schools need to be prepared to teach their classes online if the need arises. There is great concern amongst rural teachers that if their school has an outbreak and teachers and students are forced into isolation the ability to find relief teachers will be difficult if not impossible.

Teachers and students, on the whole, have started school positively but there is no doubt a heightened level of anxiety amongst all involved in rural and remote schools about the prospects of an uninterrupted school year in 2022.

Best wishes to everyone involved in the rural and remote schooling system in 2022. If State Council can assist with any of your concerns as the year progresses, please reach out to us.