

EARLY CHILDHOOD PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2024

The Early Childhood sector across Queensland continues to experience many challenges. Currently, the biggest problem is a shortage of Early Childhood trained professionals. These shortages are more pronounced in rural and remote areas where attracting and retaining early childhood educators is an ongoing concern. Access to suitable training for interested rural and remote residents is also a barrier. ICPA Qld is working with the Department of Education (DoE) to assist Early Childhood professionals to enter the Rural and remote sectors, become settled and be a part of the community.

At the 2023 Julia Creek conference there was seven Early Childhood motions presented. These motions related to access to learning support for State Based Kindergarten programs, funding, and establishment of early childhood programs in rural and remote areas and staffing!

State Delivered Kindy (SDK)

There are 119 schools delivering State Delivered Kindergarten across remote parts of Queensland enabling over 819 students to have access to Kindy where there are no other opportunities. At recent delegations, the Department of Education assured ICPA Qld that many resources are available to assist with Learning Support for children with identified specific needs enrolled in State Delivered Kindergarten programs. The DoE indicated that they would follow up with regional SDK advisors to clearly communicate the availability of these resources to principals.

In addition, the DoE committed to ensuring that any school with SDK has suitable infrastructure and general resourcing. In each departmental region, a team of dedicated State Delivered Kindergarten (SDK) Senior Advisors and SDK Heads of DoE are funded and available to provide direct operational, curriculum, teaching and learning support to schools to ensure quality kindergarten delivery.

eKindy

The DoE is committed to ensuring all children have access to kindergarten no matter wherever they live. The eKindy program is no longer a standalone program and has now been absorbed into the Brisbane School of Distance Education which we have been told has been a wonderful transition. Brisbane School of Distance Education (BSDE) continues to deliver eKindy as a priority program. BSDE support the capability development of their staff in the delivery of eKindy. eKindy students now have access to the Brisbane School of Distance Education's speech pathologist. There are 139 students enrolled for 2024.

The DoE assures ICPA Qld that there will always be a face-to-face component with the eKindy program, regardless of any changes within BSDE, and has reiterated that a dual mode of delivery is critical with both online and field services being offered. In addition to the Brisbane SDE teachers, there are currently eKindy teachers based at both Longreach School of Distance Education and the Emerald campus of Capricornia School of Distance Education.

The DoE encourages families to enrol early in the eKindy program, so schools can be prepared. During the past 12 months we have seen the Partners in Learning Program offered to eKindy families. We are now seeing some eKindy students attending their closest State Delivered Kindy for one day a week. This model can also be undertaken with other Kindy providers.

In Home Care

The In-Home Care program continues to be challenging for rural and remote families, given that the eligibility criteria does not align with the lifestyle of our families. ICPA Qld works closely with ICPA Australia in its advocacy to find equitable solutions to streamline the program in rural and remote settings.

ICPA Qld met with representatives in the In-Home Care sector at the November delegations to share our concerns. As a result of this contact, Qld State Council was able to contribute to the In-Home Care review that is currently being undertaken.

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