

**ICPA NSW Presidents Report
Adelaide - July 2025**

Annabel Strachan

Madam President, Distinguished Guests, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege to be representing ICPA NSW in our contribution towards establishing equitable access to education for rural, regional, remote, and very remote families. We all passionately believe that an educated and forward-thinking rural population is vital for Australia and now more than ever before.

Our annual NSW State Conference was held in Euston and hosted by Balranald Branch in March with 134 registrations. The discussion was vigorous, and I was delighted to note the enthusiasm and confidence of our members as evidenced by a larger than normal number of floor motions.

I would like to acknowledge past president Tanya Mitchell's steering of the ICPA-NSW ship as president. She has led with compassion and diligence and would personally like to thank her for her invaluable support of me in the role. ICPA-NSW thanks leaving councillors, Claire Butler, Robin Beckwith, MiFi Kellahan and our merchandise manager David Shrimpton. We are grateful for their huge dedication and time supporting the effort to achieve an equitable education for NSW isolated families. ICPA-NSW honours the incredible contribution Kerrie Johnston has made to ICPA-NSW through her many years of editing of Top Wire.

ICPA-NSW has decided that we will be taking our Top Wire to an online platform and council is pleased with our first edition. Thank you to our new editor Elizabeth Rosser, and publisher and designer Tracey Dewell for putting together a great online magazine.

Numerous new motions were passed at conference but unfortunately, we have many older motions still unresolved. Regional, rural and remote life is complex and ever changing. ICPA-NSW wishes to assist our partners in the Department of Education (DoE) to tailor ways to address these changes with bespoke fit-for-purpose methods.

ICPA-NSW recognises these shifts in the challenges to obtaining education, through conference motions and we are determined to advocate for a better 'liveability score' for rural families. Equitable education is obviously as important as ever in achieving that score. ICPA-NSW works hard to offer flexible and sustainable solutions to the barriers faced by geographically isolated families. DoE and other authorities have often applauded these solutions. Therefore, we look forward to continuing to collaborate with the relevant authorities to implement innovative methods to ensure an excellent rural education is accessible, as speedily as possible.

Details of all regions are different. ICPA-NSW recognises the country and city divide and that therefore often decision makers do not have access to the realities of living in isolation.

Following is an example of the complexity of creating sustainable staff retention illustrating how urgent constant and positive dialogue is between NSW DoE and ICPA-NSW.

A decade ago, in far western NSW the DEL (Director Education Leadership) lived in the communities that they serviced and understood the vagaries of life in regional, rural and remote NSW. The Release from Face-to-Face Teaching (RFF) position supports Teaching Principal 1 (TP1) positions in remote schools, it was permanent and had a DoE car attached to it. In far western NSW the RFF position was shared between two schools serviced by dirt roads and without overnight accommodation. A departmental decision without consultation, to reallocate the car and the permanency position made the RFF position thereafter, impossible to fill. Subsequently constant RFF relief became unavailable to the TP1 schools. Currently the DELs generally do not live as locally to the remote schools. It is now extremely important that genuine community consultation to thoroughly understand the implications of departmental decisions, is undergone with local communities.

ICPA-NSW and the DoE wish to achieve the best possible outcomes for rural students.

Considering the decade 2013-2023 Education, Management and Administration, Project Management reported that students in remote areas of NSW face greater challenges compared to their metropolitan peers and that there remain considerable gaps in access and outcomes between rural and metropolitan students. In approximate terms only about half of regional, rural and remote NSW students are tracking on or above the minimum standards in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains & retention into final years of schooling. (www.audit.nsw.gov.au).

That being the case, coupled with the knowledge and willingness of ICPA-NSW, to work in tandem with the NSW DoE, ICPA-NSW wishes to ensure that our solutions to motions which the DoE agrees upon are introduced as swiftly as possible.

ICPA-NSW met with relevant Ministers and DoE staff at our June deputation, including the Secretary of NSW Department of Education, Murat Dizdar PSM and warmly invite any representatives to visit isolated NSW and experience through seeing the challenges in accessing an equitable education.

Following are some of the issues taken to deputation:

That NSW remote and very remote TP1 and TP2 DoE primary schools be reclassified to dually host enrolled distance education preschoolers from age 3 and secondary students. Both cohorts would be supported by a SLSO (School Learning Support Officer). The primary schools obviously would retain their TP1/2 teaching principal. The public school would host the above students as “pop-up pop-down” model similar to the B4Kindy model, thus becoming education hubs for their remote locality.

Preschool School Drive Subsidy (SDS) the trial commenced term 1 2022 and extended until the end of 2023. When we met TfNSW (Transport for NSW) in September 2024 the trial should have been evaluated by the end of 2024. Here we are 18 months since it was completed, and ICPA-NSW is still waiting for an answer as to whether it will be implemented.

Broken Hill School of the Air (SOTA) playground - The P & C committed funding over 5 years ago to support the purchase of outdoor furniture and play equipment. Currently, approximately one hundred students are limited to uneven concrete carpark with no shade or playground equipment. We would like the NSW DoE/School Infrastructure to prioritise and expediate the construction of a playground area.

The Living Away from Home allowance (LAFHA) needs to be increased to support the higher cost associated with rural and remote living and remove the adjusted income test as it is an access issue not relevant to the family income.

ICPA-NSW was pleased with the following positives from the deputation:

- Cement slabs are being poured ready for the new generators at Louth and Wanaaring Public Schools.
- TfNSW have agreed to run buses to Broken Hill from Yanco and include Victorian students in their route to the State border.

Since March we have appeared before the Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports available for Children and Young People in NSW. ICPA-NSW had contributed to the committee's work via a submission compiled by Gabie Le Lievre.

ICPA-NSW welcomes the news that Alison House Broken Hill will reopen in 2027. We acknowledge the challenging work of the committee to make this happen.

Annabel Strachan
President
ICPA-NSW