

**ICPA WA 2025 President's Report
Adelaide - July 2025**

Jane Cunningham

The past year has been both busy and productive year for ICPA WA.

The WA State Election in March brought significant changes, including the appointment of a new Minister for Education, Sabine Winton, and a new Shadow Minister for Education, Liam Staltari. ICPA WA met with both Ministers in June and was encouraged by their willingness to engage with the ongoing challenges raised by our members.

While we feel that education-related issues are being heard and considered by the new Minister, our efforts to address longstanding concerns with the orange school bus service remain largely unaddressed. Despite holding regular meetings with the Manager of School Bus Services (SBS), efforts to secure a meeting with the Minister for Transport have been unsuccessful.

This is disappointing, as ICPA WA approaches these matters with a solutions-focused mindset, aiming to improve the system and pre-empt issues for families. We continue to strongly advocate for SBS to engage more effectively with communities—particularly through local School Bus Advisory Committees (SBACs)—as outlined in the Student Transport Assistance Policy and Operational Guidelines.

State Council continues to receive numerous requests for support from members regarding route changes and bus cancellations. These disputes often take considerable time for SBS to manage. Our goal is to improve communication and outcomes for both families and contractors—ultimately reducing the workload for SBS as well.

To assist members, we are currently developing a step-by-step flow chart to help branches and individuals navigate school bus service processes more effectively. This resource will soon be available and is intended to provide clear guidance on the process and how to escalate concerns when required.

Following the March State Election and our 2025 State Conference, ICPA WA developed a concise and accessible document outlining our key advocacy focus areas for the year ahead — ICPA WA: Policy Priorities 2025. This document has been distributed to all WA Members of Parliament including the Legislative Assembly, Department of Education representatives, and key stakeholders across the education sector.

It highlights the most pressing issues affecting rural and remote families and clearly articulates the policy changes we are advocating for. We've been encouraged to see this document in the hands of stakeholders during meetings, and we've received positive feedback from several government and education leaders. It is heartening to know that the priorities of our members are being seen, acknowledged, and considered at the decision-making table.

Policy Priorities 2025 is proving to be a powerful advocacy tool, helping to keep the needs of rural and remote students front of mind in education policy discussions. The document is available on our website: www.icpa.com.au/wa

ICPA WA member numbers continue to trend upward, reflecting growing awareness of and engagement with our advocacy. In regions where branches are strong, they remain exceptionally

active with string numbers. However, several branches continue to face challenges in remaining constitutional—particularly in maintaining sufficient membership numbers or securing office bearers able to carry out the necessary duties.

In October 2024, four State Councillors travelled to Esperance to support the branch that has seen a challenging couple of years. We met with current and prospective members, as well as local education stakeholders. The visit included outreach to small communities and schools in the region and proved to be both positive and productive. We extend our thanks to Esperance Branch President, Jane Wandel, for her support and leadership during this initiative.

ICPA WA hopes to continue this targeted support model in 2025 by visiting and working alongside another branch in need of support. Strengthening our grassroots network remains essential to ensuring our collective voice continues to grow and reach decision-makers across the state.

The 53rd Annual ICPA WA State Conference was held on March 28, 2025, at the Swan River Hotel. Hosted by the Goldfields Eyre Branch, it was a fantastic and well-supported event that brought together ICPA members and stakeholders passionate about regional, rural, and remote education.

Over 30 members made the trip to Perth to attend the conference to consider the 40 agenda and supplementary motions presented along with one floor motion. We were pleased to welcome ICPA Australia President Louise Martin and Councillor Jen Ruska, who both travelled from Queensland for the event. As always, we also warmly welcomed REVISE representatives Denise Hilsz and Sue Potter.

Many representatives from the Department of Education attended, including Ester Kerr, Network Principal of the School of the Air (SOTA), along with four SOTA Principals. Also in attendance were Doug Cook, Director of Agricultural Education; Vick McKeown, Executive Director of Schooling Operations and Initiatives; and Steve Watson, Deputy Director of Schools, who officially opened and addressed the conference.

Representatives from the Department of Transport, John Bailly and Anthony Cattai, were present and provided valuable input on the many travel-related motions raised by our members.

We were also fortunate to have a range of other organisations and schools take the time to attend and contribute to the conference. These included Peter Rundle MLA, Kirralee Warr MLA, Sandra Carr MLC, The Country Women's Association of WA (CWA), Western Australian Council of State Schools Organisations (WACSSO), Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA), Telstra, NBN Co, Regional Tech Hub, Wesley College, St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls, Presbyterian Ladies' College, Geraldton Grammar School, Perth College, Rotary Residential College, Great Southern Grammar, St Mary's Anglican Girls' School, and Australian Christian College.

Andrew Whitehouse, the Angela Wright Bennett Professor of Autism Research and the Director of CliniKids at The Kids Institute Australia was our guest speaker. Andrew shared insights into how the diagnosis of autism in children has evolved over the years, highlighting the significant rise in diagnosis rates. He spoke passionately about the importance of supporting children with autism to thrive—not just survive. His message resonated deeply with everyone in the room, from parents to educators, who listened with great interest.

Our second speaker was Alex Jenkins, Director of the WA Data Science Innovation Hub and Chair and founder of the Curtin AI in Research Group. Alex gave a fascinating presentation on the evolution of

artificial intelligence and how it is being developed to support the future of education. His insights offered a glimpse into the potential of AI to enhance learning experiences and educational outcomes.

Another highlight of the day was Fiona Mann from the Mid West Branch, who shared her family's experience with accessing basic school bus services to their nearest appropriate schools. Hearing this story firsthand was deeply impactful for both our members and the representatives from various organisations in attendance.

As always as soon as one Conference finishes, plans are underway for the next! We are very thankful to have the Meekatharra Air Branch hosting in 2026 on Friday the 27th of March.

At the ICPA WA AGM, we farewelled three long-standing ICPA WA State Councillors Sally Brindal, Kym Ross and Chandra Ridley. Their hard work, passion and commitment have significantly contributed to the growth and development of the organisation. At the same time we welcomed two new State Councilors, Megan Dorrell, Lakes District and Lauren Lewis, Meekatharra Air Branch. ICPA WA State Council is still three councillors below capacity which does have a significant impact on workload and restricts the impact we can have.

Megan and Lauren have jumped straight into their new roles on State Council with recent face-to-face meetings in Perth in June. Our first two days face-to-face post-conference were filled with productive advocacy meetings, strategic planning sessions, and even a chance to enjoy the rain-soaked beauty of Lightscape at King's Park. Of course, no ICPA gathering is complete without a memorable moment — this time it was a surprise 1am fire alarm that saw us all briefly evacuated onto the street in our pyjamas!

During our time together, we were pleased to welcome Caroline Robinson from 150Square, who facilitated a valuable session on governance and strategic planning. We look forward to continuing this important work and building on the foundations established during her session to strengthen ICPA WA's direction and impact.

So far, we have started the ICPA WA year with the following meetings:

- Minister for Education, Sabine Winton
- Shadow Minister for Education, Liam Staltari
- Director General Jay Peckitt, Deputy Director General of Schools Steve Watson, Deputy Director General of People and Student Achievement Melesha Sands, Peter Lillywhite, Principal of the School of Swimming and Water Safety.
- Anthony Cattai, Manager of School Bus Services (SBS)
- Stephen Gneil, CEO of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) alongside Western Australian Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO) and Catholic Schools Parents WA
- Paul Mathews, Principal of the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE)
- Elise Petty, NBN Executive Manager for Education and Regional Stakeholder Relations.
- Systems Alliance Meeting with Director General Jay Peckitt and key associations
- Telstra Regional Forum Amelia Radke, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)
- Sandra Carr MLC, Member for Agricultural Region
- Telstra WA Regional Connectivity Policy Workshop (thanks Sally for attending!)
- Telstra Regional Workshop

ICPA WA played a key role in the development of a pilot program designed to support small schools with multi-age classrooms through SIDE (School of Isolated and Distance Education). As part of this trial, 19 small schools are currently delivering mathematics and/or science to specific year levels via distance education, directly into the classroom.

For example, in a composite class of Years 2 to 6, students in Years 4, 5, and 6 now receive maths lessons via SIDE, allowing the classroom teacher to focus solely on Years 2 and 3 during maths instruction. This model has significantly reduced the burden on classroom teachers and enhanced learning outcomes for students.

The trial has been highly successful, and we understand there are plans to expand it in 2026 to include more schools and additional subjects.

Notably, the concept for this program originated from informal discussions at the Federal Conference in Darwin—highlighting the real influence and impact of ICPA advocacy, even in casual conversations. This initiative is a testament to the value of member-led dialogue and the strength of our collective voice.

We continue to work towards many longstanding advocacy priorities including the development of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) and significantly increasing the Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA). These priorities sit alongside a broader agenda of addressing the many ongoing inequities across our portfolio areas — from early childhood through to tertiary education and training. As we look to 2026 and beyond, our commitment remains steadfast: to ensure that the educational opportunities available to rural and remote families are not limited by where they live.

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