



2026 Student Travel Portfolio Conference Report

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The phrase “Tyranny of Distance” is most closely associated with the Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey, but the notion obviously pre-dates his 1966 book of the same name. What is almost a certainty for those of you reading this is that you know, when you get into the car, that you are going to be in it for sometime.....

There were seven travel motions put to the annual conference last year.

They were all linked to air travel, which tell you of the needs of the families in remote and very remote parts of country. To get to school and back for rural and remote students is an achievement within itself for many families.

The short answer to most of the travel issues is that it is a state or territory issue. Getting to school is their business with air fares, bus and train passes, and some self-drive help for parents if they need to connect with the public transport service. Obviously, some jurisdictions do this better than others or offer a different mix of allowances that assist families – it is a pity that the best of each one is not universal.

Apart from delegations to Canberra to promote our positions as determined by the motions passed at conference, we had the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission about a review into regional airfares. We had an online meeting with the Commission and submitted a written response – my great thanks to Kylie Camp for pulling that together.

Extracts from the Productivity Commission Report (Inquiry Paper):*The costs for families to send their children to boarding school is significant and for many, the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme provides vital but inadequate support that does not extend to the costs associated with air travel. The inflated costs of regional air travel and its disproportionate impact on families living in remote and regional areas is a vital consideration for this inquiry.*

[Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia (ICPA)] strongly recommends the embedding of student capped fares on commercial air routes to facilitate affordable access to educational services. ICPA strongly recommends that the fees and charges being applied on top of ticket prices, which are sometimes significant extra costs, be investigated and methods be considered to offset/reduce these in order to reduce overall ticket pricing. (ICPA, sub. 86, p. 2)

These [concessional] fares are usually around \$200 less than the regular fare. Whilst this is a step in the right direction ... These residential fares need to be capped at a maximum fixed price of say \$300 Mount Isa to Brisbane and \$250 Mount Isa to Townsville for every flight available. (Adam McLure, sub. 11, p. 3) ... whilst there are resident fares offered by some operators, these must begin from their residential address. Students returning home from school cannot access these deals to reduce cost. (ICPA, sub. 86, p. 3)

Although I have been travelling a bit by air this year, I have not been on the revamped Regional Express (Rex) service. It has a new owner/operator with a US based company Air T. It begs the question.....when will the marketing team re-brand it as “T-Rex”? A T-Rex painted on the tail of the Saab would get lots of selfies with passengers!



PACER Rebate levels continue in 2026

PACER (The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate) has been moved from Rural Schools to the Student Travel portfolio in 2026, where it technically belongs.

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) is an initiative of the Australian Government which provides financial assistance for students in Years 4-12 across Australia to travel to Canberra, the nation's capital.

The program operates as a rebate which is paid directly to schools after they have met the eligibility requirements for funding. The payment is a subsidy and is not meant to cover all costs. Distances are calculated by road to Canberra using the most favourable travelling routes which are not necessarily the shortest. [Google Maps](#) will be used to determine this. Funds are allocated on a per student basis at rates varying according to distance travelled.

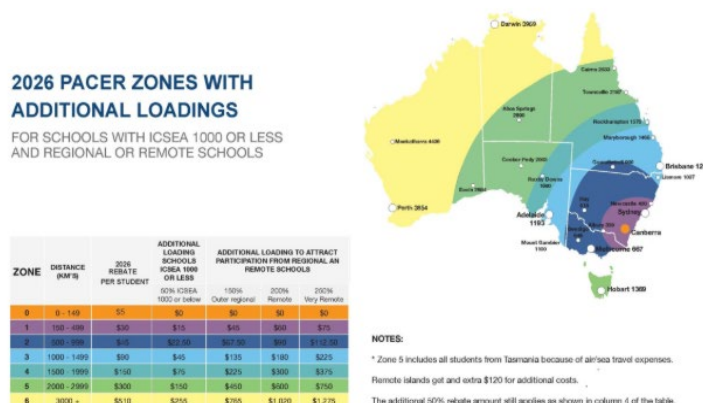
No changes have been made to account for remoteness and ease of access to transport options. A review of PACER in 2026 simply saw the temporary 50% increased PACER rebate rate (2024) is confirmed for 2026-2027.

ICPA (Aust) has maintained its pressure for PACER distance calculation method to account for remoteness and ease of access to transport options for students travel to Canberra to participate in program.

We received acknowledgement from several Ministers and Senators and held productive discussions with Meg Brighton (Deputy Secretary for Education). Statistics indicate the increased loadings are having an impact on participation in the PACER program so there is appetite to make the loading permanent. The Department of Education indicated they would further consider other points raised such as distance travelled to point of departure in the upcoming review of PACER.

Despite this, no changes have been made to account for remoteness and ease of access to transport options. A review of PACER in 2026 simply saw the temporary 50% increased PACER rebate rate (2024) is confirmed for 2026-2027.

To check the total rebate your school may be eligible for, please download your School Profile Data, which includes your **ACARA ID**, **remoteness classification** and **ICSEA value** – [CHECK YOUR SCHOOL REBATE](#)



Thank you for the support from my fellow Federal Councillors this past year. They are terrific.