

Established in 1971, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) is a national organisation representing regional students and their families at all stages of education and has a large network of branches throughout Australia.

MEDIA RELEASE

21st APRIL 2026

RURAL STUDENTS CONTINUE TO BE LEFT BEHIND AS GOVT ANNOUNCES TRANSPORT RELIEF

In light of recent announcements by the WA Premier to ease cost-of-living pressures, ICPA WA is calling on the State Transport Department to better support rural and remote families who must travel great distances for their own children to access education.

On Sunday, State Premier Roger Cook and Transport Minister Rita Saffioti announced the permanency of a program permitting free public transport for students with smart riders going to and from school.

While ICPA WA welcomes any financial assistance for students, rural or not, this announcement is a stark reminder of how simple policy decisions can easily leave behind country students.

Not only do many rural and remote students not benefit at all from the announcement, but their families are still faced with the costs of travelling long distances for the sake of education.

Transport expenses have only been compounded by the rise in everyday costs, and our families, most of whom are primary producers, have been hit hard in recent times.

“The cost of educating children in regional and remote Western Australia is placing an increasing strain on families,” ICPA WA Vice President Jasmyn Allen said.

“From boarding fees to the significant travel expenses faced by School of the Air families to access face-to-face learning, these are not optional extras—they are essential costs to access a basic public education. Without adequate support, many families are being forced to make difficult decisions about their children’s schooling, and that’s simply not acceptable in a state like ours.”

ICPA WA is advocating for equitable access to education for all students, and we ask the WA Government to take on our calls for:

An increase to the Public Transport Authority Conveyance Allowance

ICPA WA is calling for an increase in the Public Transport Authority Conveyance Allowance to match the Australian Taxation Office's 88 cents per kilometre rate.

For rural families, daily school travel often means long distances in private vehicles, either to drop their children off at the nearest bus stop or to take them directly to school.

This comes at a cost that far exceeds the current allowance.

While metropolitan students benefit from subsidised public transport, rural families receive far less support despite facing greater expenses.

Aligning the allowance with the ATO benchmark would more accurately reflect real vehicle costs and deliver a fairer, more equitable system.

Conveyance Allowance for distance education children

ICPA (WA) is calling on the State Government to introduce a conveyancing allowance for families of School of the Air students who must travel long distances to attend essential in-school learning programs.

Currently, geographically isolated students enrolled in WA's Schools of the Airs rely on attending camps to access core curriculum, complete mandatory assessments, and develop essential social skills—opportunities they cannot get online or at home in the bush.

However, by the simple fact that these sessions are named “camps” (because students are spending several days away from home), distance education children are excluded from any current transport assistance.

This leaves families bearing the significant financial burden of travelling hundreds of kilometres so that their children can access programs essential to their educational and social development.

Murchison Pastoralist Lauren Lewis, who lives on Yarrabubba Station with her family, said the learning opportunities provided by these camps are an “absolutely crucial key part” of her children's education.

Her two children are enrolled in Meekatharra School of the Air (MSOTA), which provides daily computer lessons (Air lessons).

“I believe you can teach maths and English in an isolated environment, but experiences of social interaction with their peers, swimming lessons, and face-to-face learning opportunities are near on impossible,” Mrs Lewis said.

“A conveyance allowance would ensure that all families are still able to attend these events.”

Yarabubba Station is 607 km away from Geraldton, where MSOTA is based and holds its camps.

“In our case, we would incur approximately \$620 in fuel costs alone for just one of the three required return trips to Geraldton, placing a significant financial burden on our family,” Mrs Lewis said.

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