
Early Childhood

Dear Madam President, Distinguished Guests, fellow State Councillors, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present the Early Childhood Report for ICPA-NSW for the 2022 year.

Remote Preschools

Since 2014 ICPA-NSW has urged the NSW government to establish preschools within remote and very remote primary schools, to enable four-year-olds to have practical access.

ICPA-NSW has always suggested that this system be DE (Distance Education) or SOTA (School of the Air) delivery so it would be effectively a “pop up/pop down” model to allow for the population volatility of remote schools.

This has finally been agreed with and some regional towns such as Ivanhoe have had preschools established.

Louth preschool is also established. It was begun with Cobar Shire as its provider which was not sustainable due to the impracticality of needing to attract an ECT (Early Childhood Trained Teacher) to physically support the SLSO (Student Learning Support Officer) and the distances the trained ECT had to travel to supervise.

Thus, Louth preschool has now aligned itself with Dubbo School of Distance Education and the community are aware of its existence. The only drawback is that the teaching principal has to oversee the preschool, for which they industrially are not compensated.

Wanaaring has two eligible pre-schoolers who are not enrolled. The UAG (Universal Access Guarantee) stipulates that vulnerable families must benefit. It behoves the ECECD (Early Childhood Education Care Directorate) to ensure that enrolment actually happens.

Despite the best efforts of the current busy teaching principal to encourage families to do the enrolment paperwork; the possible candidate to apply for the SLSO job and liaise with SOTA ... it must be acknowledged that they have time constraints.

The two children who are eligible are currently not accessing preschool.

Weilmoringle is in the same situation. While they had a preschool from 2018-2020 with Mary MacKillop as the provider it did not continue as there were not any eligible pre-schoolers. It is worth noting that this model was expensive.

Currently at Weilmoringle there is one, possibly two, eligible children. There isn't a preschool because their community has accepted (falsely) that they do not have preschool.

ICPA-NSW would like to note that when access to a preschool becomes known about in a remote community and the process of accessing it is not overwhelmingly arduous, families tend to move to or stay to enable their children to attend; as happened at Enngonia.

At the time of writing ICPA-NSW looks forward to hearing from the ECECD, answers to the questions which were taken on notice last year, regarding the above-mentioned blocks to provision of mandated access to pre-schoolers for ALL four year olds.

The two girls who attended Louth preschool last year and have just begun their kindy year are reportedly ready for school and ICPA-NSW wishes them a continued lifetime of learning. Learning which they may not have been able to achieve without an equal start to education.

Regional, Rural & Remote Education Policy

During the fortnightly meetings with the Regional, Rural & Remote Education Policy team, we continue to bring up any concerns or issues. We were also able to have in-depth conversations about the new government announcements into Early Childhood and what this will mean for rural and remote areas.

Announcements

ICPA-NSW is excited about the announcements and some of these are stated below from the CCSA website.

- \$97.6 million (\$722.7 million in recurrent expenses over four years) to continue to provide fee relief for children aged three to five years in community, mobile and Department of Education preschools through the Affordable Preschool Program which will replace Start Strong Free Preschool from January 2023. The existing core funding to community preschools will continue through the Start Strong funding program.
- \$80.3 million (\$594.6 million in recurrent expenses over four years) to provide fee relief of up to \$2,000 per child per year for four to five years old children attending preschool in long day care.
- \$53.1 million (\$281.6 million in recurrent expenses over four years) to ensure quality, retention, and supply of early childhood educators to address existing serious shortages and build for future demand. This funding is expected to benefit over 18,000 future and current early childhood teachers and educators and will be used across a range of programs including:
 - early childhood teacher higher education scholarships of up to \$25,000 to provide financial support while studying bachelor-level qualifications; students could also be eligible for a completion incentive payment if they remain employed in the early childhood education and care sector.
 - scholarships for students undertaking VET qualifications of up to \$2,000, in addition to the skills support available under JobTrainer and Smart and Skilled programs.
 - early childhood teacher supports, including supplements for employers who demonstrate best-practice workforce strategies.
- \$40.2 million (\$53.4 million in recurrent expenses over four years) for planning, consultation, and early steps in the implementation of universal pre-kindergarten for all children in New South Wales in the year before school.
- \$15.5 million (\$64.1 million in recurrent expenses over four years) to trial funding in 2023 and 2024 for three-year old preschool programs in long day care.

- \$6.6 million (\$27.3 million in recurrent expenses over four years) for developmental checks in preschools in both metropolitan and rural areas. This is part of a combined package of \$111.2 million over four years jointly delivered by the Department of Education and NSW Health through the Brighter Beginnings initiative.

NSW Government has earmarked up to \$10.7 billion over 10 years for significant longer-term early childhood education reforms. This includes up to \$5.0 billion for the Affordable and Accessible Childcare and Economic Participation Fund and \$5.7 billion to introduce a high-quality universal pre-Kindergarten year for all children in New South Wales in the year before school by 2030.¹

At our Deputation in Sydney in June, we continued to advocate for our members issues, particularly around pay parity and incentives for Early Childhood Teachers. With the new announcement by the government, we are hoping that we might see an increase in enrolments into these degrees.

Laura Stalley, Deborah Nielsen, Annabel Strachan and Tanya Mitchell

¹ CCSA, "2022 NSW Government Budget Highlights", <https://ccsa.org.au/news/2022-nsw-government-budget-highlights/> as for 6th October 2022