
RURAL SCHOOLS

I can only start by saying what a different year 2020 was, not only for ICPA but everyone worldwide. March saw the state conference cancelled in Moree in the early days of the pandemic but as the year progressed nearly all gatherings were cancelled. Our mini deputation in June and our main deputation in October were also cancelled. We decided that we would have the main deputation in Dubbo in October and have zoom meetings with the relevant politicians and other stakeholders. Although a great alternative not quite the same as face-to-face meetings.

Since my last report ICPA-NSW was invited to participate via zoom in the “Rural and Remote Consultation Process” these were in the form of forums and meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders across NSW to help shape the future of rural and remote education. Primarily it was to complete an online survey, but ICPA-NSW was able to submit a paper using the four key areas that were identified.

- Investing in and valuing our people
- Strengthening quality teaching and learning
- Enabling learning environments
- Building productive partnerships

With these key areas identified ICPA-NSW submitted a paper using many of our motions, giving ideas, solutions and suggestions that we believe could improve educational outcomes in regional and remote areas.

In August 2020 ICPA-NSW sent a submission to the Parliamentary Review of the New South Wales School Curriculum NSW Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education.

The first part of the inquiry was based mostly on the “Masters Curriculum Review”. ICPA-NSW supports many of Professor Geoff Masters findings especially the overcrowded curriculum and the need to provide every child with solid foundations in the basics, especially oral language development, early reading, writing skills, early mathematics knowledge and skills. Once again ICPA-NSW was able to include many motions in answering the “Terms of Reference” including the importance of the 600 hours for pre-schoolers, remote and very remote children be eligible for the School Drive Subsidy and the need to be included in the priority group for 3-year-olds which would allow rural and remote students access to their 600 hours of preschool over two years. In question 4 of the terms of reference it was asked “any other related matters”, in this question we were able to put many other motions that we felt relevant to education such as better internet connection for remote schools, expansion of mobile coverage, second computers for School of the Air (SOTA) students, multiple visits by directors to remote schools, the importance of keeping the RAR positions, the Rural Experience programs, and the handover between principals.

On the 4th of November, Deborah Nielsen and myself gave evidence at a hearing for the Inquiry into the Review of NSW School Curriculum via videoconference. The committee we met with included The Hon. Mark Latham who was the chair, The Hon. Anthony D’Adam, The Hon. Wes Fang, The Hon. Scott Farlow, Mr David Shoebridge and present by videoconference was The Hon. Courtney Houssos and The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox (Deputy Chair). This once again gave us the opportunity to discuss several of our motions and believe that it is another great platform to share as much information as we can with current politicians.

ICPA-NSW was asked to be a representative on the community consultation group by NSW Centre for Effective Reading. The Centre for Effective Reading is drafting their strategic direction for the next 4 years. As rural schools’ portfolio I attended the first initial meeting to outline the draft strategic improvement plan. There will be ongoing meetings to focus on implementation and progress monitoring of the plan and annual reflection. The Centre for Effective Reading gives direct support for rural and remote primary school aged students with complex reading difficulties and their teachers. The centres functions include assessment and diagnosis, intervention, professional learning and support, research and development. Their hubs are in

Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Manly and Westmead and are incredibly supportive of our rural and remote children.

Our deputation in October 2020 was held at Dubbo, once again giving us the opportunity to meet with politicians via zoom and although it was vastly different to our Sydney deputation proved to be incredibly positive. We met with not only politicians but Department of Education personnel and other educational stakeholders some of which were face-to-face. NSW-ICPA was able to meet with The Hon. Sarah Mitchell via zoom this is greatly beneficial for rural schools' motions as most would be directed to the Minister for Education. Many motions were put forward and it was great to have some discussion and feedback.

While at deputation a Media Release was issued stating that "New South Wales public school students including those in the state's most remote areas, will soon have access to high-speed connectivity under a new partnership between Telstra and the New South Wales Department of Education." Students could experience a more than ten-fold increase in data speeds via a massive bandwidth boost as well as fibre optic connectivity. This new 328 million dollar project will connect the state's 12 remaining schools to the high-speed solution. These include the remaining satellite schools which ICPA have been lobbying for better connectivity for some time. The following schools are included in this roll out:

- Louth
- Wanaaring
- Clare
- Naradhan
- Booligal
- Enngonia
- North Star
- Weilmoringle

The project will be progressively rolled out over the next 18 months.

ICPA-NSW thanks the NSW Department of Education and Telstra as this will make a huge difference to our rural and remote satellite schools.

As I conclude, I would like to say to ICPA members please do not be disillusioned that a motion that has been taken to the relevant department and despite the minister agreeing with the motion and circumstances still appears not to be actioned. Your state council takes each motion, whether it is a new motion or a recurring motion that has been presented for many years, to the applicable department with detailed information and enthusiasm every time. Although disappointing for council that despite a positive meeting and the Department or Minister siding with ICPA and understanding the issue, progress moves so very slowly. We will continue to advocate on behalf of our members and look forward to more of our issues being solved.

I believe in this wonderful saying that nothing can take the place of persistence and perseverance. The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve many problems that we face.

Once again, I would like to thank all my fellow state councillors for their support. This was a challenging year for all and brought new issues to our ICPA with boarder closures and COVID requirements, well done to all those state councillors who put so much work and effort into this area.

Annabel Strachan

Rural Schools portfolio

