

## **PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL**

### **RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS REPORT**

#### **Naomi Obst – Portfolio Holder, March 2021**

COVID-19 has certainly provided many challenges for 2020 and continues to challenge us in 2021. Being isolated suddenly became an advantage, being able to work and study alone was a newfound skill for many in the urban areas. For those in the regions it was largely business as usual.

For those who had to adjust to online learning it was a totally foreign concept. So foreign that I actually received a letter from a gentleman in England who had found my address through the Midwest ICPA Branch. He requested information on how we managed to teach remotely, what was this “School of the Air”? How do you structure the day? How do you even teach your own kids in your own home? I was able to give him a brief outline and gave him the names of some educators far more experienced in this area than myself. COVID-19, it has been devastating and disruptive for many people. However, I think it has taught many around the world what we have always known and do so well.

It is time for ICPA to capture this movement and make sure that we can have the best education for all our rural students no matter their location when face-to-face teaching cannot occur. We have some very clever and inspiring teachers with an amazing array of technology to lead our children on their learning journey. I hope that we are able to build on the Strengths of SOTA and SIDE (was it mentioned by our political leaders what an amazing institution this is during school closures?) to develop programs for small schools to give them access to inspiring and subject specific teachers via an online platform. COVID-19 and the ensuing shutdowns/school closures has shown the rest of the world what ICPA members have always known and done so well.

#### **DENTAL VANS**

Central Wheatbelt North submitted a motion at the 2020 State Conference: *“That ICPA WA lobby the Minister for Education to ensure that services such as the mobile Dental Therapy Centre are not rationalised purely due to population.”*

Concerns from members have highlighted the lack of regular dental care for many children living in rural and remote areas. In the past the “Dental Van” has made an annual visit to all schools to attend to the basic dental requirements and education of dental hygiene.

This service still continues but for many families dental care involves a lengthy car trip to attend a Dental Therapy Van in a larger regional town. If any ongoing work is required then there are more trips to make and more school days are lost due to the distances needing to be travelled.

For some families, the cost of travel or inability to get time off work is having a direct impact on the children’s oral health. There are cases of children not seeing a dentist until they reach high school age in a larger regional school. Children with poor oral health in primary school will have their learning ability impacted.

ICPA State Council has written and met with the Minister for Education, Hon. Sue Ellery MLC throughout a difficult COVID-19 year, on this motion. We thank the Minister for her understanding and listening to our concerns. Minister Ellery followed up this concern with the Minister for Health, Hon. Roger Cook MLA.

The response received from the Minister for Health was that primary health care is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The State Government provides a safety net public dental service for eligible school students via the School Dental Service (SDS). This is operated by Dental Health Services and provides free general dental care to enrolled school children between the ages of five (5) and to the end of Year 11.

Mobile Dental Therapy Centres (DTC) are located across 160 sites throughout Western Australia. Eighty percent of students enrolled in the school dental service are located at feeder schools and are required to travel to a fixed or mobile site to receive dental care. It has been difficult to ascertain the exact number of students and distances required to travel for appointments for our rural students, however it is concerning that many of our students travel in excess of 200km to receive dental care.

Further communications with the Education and Health Ministers have elicited the following response: *"That...it is not an efficient use of resources for Dental Health Services to provide onsite services to every school in Western Australia. The mobile DTC provides care in schools which are strategically located and have the highest population of students."*

The locations that a Dental Therapy Centre (DTC) visit is dependent on a number of factors including:

- Number of children to be treated at a location
- The proximity to a nearby Mobile DTC service
- The availability of a suitable location within the school to house the Mobile DTC
- The availability and cost of providing the required utilities to operate the Mobile DTC
- The cost of relocating the Mobile DTC
- The availability and cost of suitable accommodation and travel for SDS staff.

ICPA (WA) State Council and its members are committed to ensuring equity for all students no matter where they live. Poor oral health for some students in our rural and remote areas is impacting their learning and we are happy to continue to lobby on your behalf to re-instate the Dental Van service for all students.

### **PRINCIPAL PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS UPDATE**

In 2019, the Esperance Branch raised the motion A8 *"For the Department to provide relevant professional development for all new Level 3 Principals"*. A follow-up conversation with the Minister for Education confirms that in 2020, forty-seven (47) new Principals have been appointed and twenty-four (24) of them have been appointed for the first time. This group of twenty-four (24) have attended the Newly Appointed Principal induction session and 88% of them have also completed the Principal Eligibility Modules. There are fifteen (15) newly appointed Principals in regional Western Australia that have completed the modules.

This is a very positive step that is providing new Principals in our small regional schools a *"tool bag"* of information that is enabling them to confidently lead our schools from day one.

We hope that the Department will continue to support this initiative so that our small rural and remote schools can begin to see some stability and length of tenure in their appointments.

### **CAMP SCHOOLS**

There were concerns in 2019 with the condition and operating procedures at the Fairbridge Camp Schools. Feedback from schools using these facilities in 2020 was good, although limited camps were operating due to COVID-19 restrictions. We will continue to watch this space in 2021 and urge any members with concerns to contact an ICPA State Councillor.

Thank you to Education Department staff and the many teachers and boarding school support staff that our children are so reliant on for an education. 2020 was a difficult year in education but our members and State Council acknowledge your efforts to ensure our children continued to receive an education.

A special thank you to Richard Stokes and Tom Dunsmore for their never-ending support within their organisation of Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and their recognition of the difficulties many families faced in returning boarders to face-to-face learning.