Isolated Children's Parents' Association of South Australia Inc.

Submission

to the

Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standards Loadings

from

State Council

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association
of South Australia Inc.

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of South Australia (ICPA SA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National School Resourcing Board's review into Regional Schooling Resource Standards Loadings with members comments that will ensure access to an equitable education for rural and remote students.

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) was established during the 1971 rural depression in Bourke, NSW by a small group of rural and remote parents when the education of their children was under threat. The original aim of ICPA remains the same: 'To gain equity of access to education for all students who live in rural and remote Australia'.

In South Australia we have more than 100-member families belonging to one of our branches: North West, Port Augusta, Eyre Peninsula, Marree Air, Marla-Oodnadatta, North East and Flinders Ranges. Provision is made for those who cannot attend branch meetings to be Lone Members.

ICPA is a rural-based parent organisation, comprised totally of volunteers. We work on behalf of all rural and remote students, irrespective of gender, race, creed or choice of school. Above all, we seek to have all elements of education – physical, academic, cultural, social, developmental and emotional – available to all students regardless of their geographic location. We believe that our children have the same educational rights and needs as their urban peers and we ask that this equity be maintained in the delivery of education to rural and remote students.

ICPA works to promote awareness and understanding of the problems and needs of rural and remote students, assisting them to gain access to appropriate schooling, special services, government and private agencies.

ICPA has achieved much in the last 40 plus years, both in South Australia and nationally, including:

• The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance, which includes boarding, distance education and second home components.
• The SA State Education Allowance for students who must live away from home to access schooling.
• The Itinerant Teacher service.
• REVISE (Retired Educator Volunteers for Isolated Children's Education) - retired teachers who "go bush" to temporarily assist with an isolated student's education.
• Playing a leading role in the improvement of rural telecommunications.
• Input into the restructuring and continued improvement of Distance Education.
• The establishment of boarding scholarships.
• Being the driving force behind the establishment of the Distance Education Supervisor Training Programme.
• Access to new and evolving learning technologies by Distance Education students.
• A regular SA newsletter 'The Pipeline' and email updates to members.

SA IPCA responses to National School Resourcing Board's Review of Regional Schooling Resource Standards Loadings

> What are the elements **specific to school location** (i.e. not related to student characteristics such as socio-educational disadvantage, students with disability, low English language proficiency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) that increase the cost of delivering education in these settings?

As students studying via Distance Education are not physically attending a school they have significantly higher costs associated with sufficient resource provision. Distance Education schools may be based in regional or city settings, however their students are often 1000's of km away from the school campus. Families of Distance Education students currently set up and resource their own classrooms, as resources cannot be purchased and shared across a school campus or within a schoolroom as would occur in a traditional school model. Because of this, Distance Education families are generally under-resourced and have limited access to tangible learning materials as most learning materials are delivered online. This lack of hands-on learning is especially detrimental for primary age students, as they benefit greatly from the use of explicit teaching methods to learn new concepts. Additionally, whilst the sharing of limited resources - such as quality readers - among the student body does occur, the inadequate quantity available leads to some students missing the boat whilst they wait for their turn.

Students rarely have the opportunity to have face-to-face contact with their teachers and peers, therefore when these events do occur, they are extremely important for both the student and teacher to attend. The cost of attending these face-to-face events often varies and is dependent on the distance travelled and the costs associated with travel, such as accommodation, food, and wear and tear on your private vehicle. For those who are the most isolated and therefore the most in need of these events, the costs are the greatest.

Distance Education students do not receive the same accessibility to services regarded as normal in metropolitan areas and this should be recognised with accurate funding.

Recommendation: The unique Distance Education setting requires a unique funding model that meets the needs of these students on the same basis as their urban peers.

> Are there additional elements associated with school size for small schools in regional and remote settings that increase the cost of delivering education over the costs for small schools in city areas (not related to student characteristics such as socio-educational disadvantage, students with disability, low English language proficiency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students)?

There are many additional costs involved with delivering and receiving education in regional and remote settings. Not only are students' families required to make a financial commitment to set up adequate Internet access prior to enrolment - which can take a considerable time to achieve – but they also need access to IT support and resource preparation.

Additionally, Distance Education schools have to purchase online subscriptions to deliver specific curricula and subjects as the content can only be delivered online. This is a huge cost to Distance Education schools and must be factored into the budget.

Staffing ratios in small schools, including schools of Distance Education, often require that a teacher has two or more year levels in a class. These students often have limited access to one-on-one time with their teacher meaning that struggling students easily slip through the cracks, and a composite class makes providing adequate student support even more challenging. Small schools are less likely to have sufficient Student Support Officer services to meet the learning needs of students. Importantly, in a Distance Education setting this additional learning support is paramount as these students, in addition to the detrimental effects experienced by their urban small school counterparts, are isolated from allied health professionals and early intervention.

Recommendation: There are many additional elements related to the geographic location of Distance Education students, a better funding model needs to be adopted to reflect these needs so Distance Education student's receive the same level of education and access to services as their metropolitan counterparts.

Is the dollar value of the current school location and school size loadings appropriate to meet the additional costs **specific to school location and school size?** (noting there are separate student-based loadings for socio-educational disadvantage, students with disability, low English language proficiency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students).

Recommendation: The definition of dollar value is ambiguous when related to Distance Education. Dollar value cannot be used based on the Distance Education student's school location, rather it should be based on the home address of the student when addressing specific location costs.

Are there elements specific to school location which have particular resourcing implications for certain types of schools in regional and remote areas, such as boarding schools and small non-systemic schools (as opposed to small systemic schools)? What are the elements?

It has been proven remote students studying via Distance Education are educationally disadvantaged. It is difficult to provide the full range and quality of education in small, isolated settings such as the home schoolroom that are more easily achieved in regional and urban schools. In addition to these difficulties are the costs for students and their families associated with travel to education institutions for additional educational activities.

Resourcing is a major shortfall for the current Distance Education provider in SA. As students do not physically attend the school, remote and isolated families are forced to resource their own schoolrooms as noted earlier. For example, Distance Education schools don't have access to general everyday resourcing, including library books, tutoring, mentoring, face-to-face student support or immediate feedback capabilities.

Students do not have access to many appropriate learning materials as most resources are delivered online. This is poor educational practice - it reduces engagement and hinders a child's ability to understand concepts using concrete, manipulative materials. During COVID lockdowns in metropolitan areas, this lack of physical interaction highlighted the disadvantage and additional needs of students learning remotely, and was widely acknowledged.

Recommendation: Resourcing is a major deficit of the current Distance Education provider in SA, additional funding should be provided to Distance Education institutions.

> Is ARIA+ the most appropriate basis for classifying locations and applying to the school location loading? Should another measure be considered?

There is a need to provide a better classification of location for Distance Education students as per their home sector and degree of isolation, as this will allow for a better statistical comparison of their participation and outcomes with the rest of the Australian student population. An exception needs to be made for Distance Education students whereby home location not school location should be used.

ARIA's systematic tailoring of services to meet the needs of Australians living in regional Australia does not allow for the physical 'remoteness' of the remote and isolated students studying via Distance Education. It is clearly far simpler to allocate schools to the appropriate geographic location category than it is to allocate individual students. Unfortunately, using a school location rather than a student's home location has not provided an accurate analysis for students studying via Distance Education.

The Distance Education provider for remote and isolated students in South Australia is not classified as per the student's remote home location, rather all students are lumped as one and are classified by the location of their school. Distance Education is delivered to students via two campuses: Open Access College, which is based in Marden, and the School Of The Air campus which is based in Port Augusta. These campuses are assigned to location categories, on a permanent basis, Marden is deemed a metropolitan zone and Port Augusta a regional zone. This provides an inaccurate classification of student's need as per the ARIA. Therefore, the research that has been undertaken to identify the relative disadvantage experienced by Distance Education students is derived on the basis of school location rather than on the home location of students.

Recommendation: The definition of geographic location used for reporting outcomes of schooling be based on the home address of the Distance Education student.

> Are there new or emerging factors that should be taken into consideration when looking at the cost of education in regional and remote areas and/or small schools?

There are many new and emerging factors that increase the cost of providing quality education in regional and remote areas, and these are noted as follows:

- The general cost of living outside of a larger regional town or city needs to be factored into the cost of delivering a quality education in regional and remote areas. This applies for both the Distance Education school and the remote schoolroom where the students actually live and complete their online learning.
- The Distance Education teacher is required to travel to visit their remote students. This is a very costly exercise but one which is of great importance.
- For many remote families the only face-to-face contact for their child requires a travel commitment.
- A priority for Distance Education students is excellent accessibility to internet and technology.
- The increasing complexity of meeting the needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties, disabilities and other challenges needs to be a priority for these isolated students.
- The ever-changing and evolving delivery of Distance Education with emerging technologies is exciting. However, it is important to ensure that whilst students have access to innovative ways of learning remotely, we must not lose sight of the need for a quality education.
- Many rural and remote towns are dwindling in size due to a range of factors. Less numbers in a town means less services which impacts the entire family but especially education.
- It is important to attract and retain quality teaching staff to these rural and remote towns.

SUMMARY (300 words)

The Distance Education schools of SA are unique. They need to be resourced in a unique way, so that students do not miss out on vital learning opportunities.

A unique funding model needs to be put in place for Distance Education students, as they cannot be defined as per the ARIA index using their school location. Dollar value doesn't equate to scenarios that lack a physical school campus, and a formula such as this is not applicable when the students' sites of learning are so diffuse. Instead of an emphasis on schools' locations, a provision for the percentage of the enrolled students who access their education online through these institutions should be made. Without this, Distance Education students will continue to receive inadequate representation for the additional costs and challenges they experience.

Loadings based on student/teacher ratio also cannot be applied to the Distance Education scenario. The unique teaching methods required in this setting place heavy demands on teachers, and this coupled with the lack of adequate support is evident in the high turnover of staff. The high level of students leaving Distance Education to access better services further highlights the inability of teachers to provide adequate support to students with additional learning needs. The formula currently in place does not allow for the specific demands and requirements of the remote and isolated student and teacher.

COVID has highlighted the plight of the online delivery of education. We hope that the outcry of our metropolitan counterparts has highlighted the difficulties faced everyday in the remote and isolated Distance Education schoolroom and the need for better funding relative to the unique Distance Education environment.