



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc.)

**FEDERAL COUNCIL
"Access to Education"**

SUBMISSION

to the

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and
Employment**

on the

**Inquiry into the Australian Education (Consequential and
Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013**

from the

Federal Council

of the

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust) is a national, apolitical, volunteer organisation that represents families who live in rural and remote Australia. Our goal is to ensure that members have access to a continuing and appropriate, quality education. Particular consideration is given to issues highly relevant to rural residents that often do not apply to metropolitan situations.

ICPA appreciates the government's commitment of ensuring adequate school funding is available to make certain all students have the support they need to achieve improved educational outcomes. ICPA advocates that government considers all aspects which contribute to educational disadvantage. Our concern remains around the lack of equity being granted by government to the families who have no choice other than to teach their students via distance education. These students also need to benefit from any reforms which take place.

Despite school funding being reviewed, alarm continues to grow for families who do not have access to mainstream, face-to-face schooling, and who have to educate their children via distance education. This form of education was not considered in the recent review, as it is classed as being 'non-school' funding. How and when this form of education will be appropriately and equitably funded continues to be questioned. The delivery cost of distance education must be comprehensively accounted for in all facets of this mode of education, including greater individual financial support for families who play a significant role in the delivery of the distance education program to their children.

The following critically important question remains unanswered:

Given that no direct references have been made in the Australian Education Bill for students studying by distance education, what specific funding provisions will be made for the unique learning situations facing distance education students, who are not physically located at the administrative hub of the distance education school and will the location loading refer to the student's home or the school's address?

To alleviate some of the inequity currently associated with the provision of distance education, and to ensure that, in future, distance education families do not continue to face the pressure and financial difficulty currently associated with educating their children, distance education should be recognised as separate, distinct and valid form of educational disadvantage. The following points must be taken into account in the process of appropriately funding distance education, within the context of school education resourcing:

Resource funding:

Too frequently, distance education schools are not acknowledged as eligible for funding programs similar to schools where face-to-face teaching takes place, merely because their students do not physically sit in the same classroom.

The cost of providing education to students studying via distance education needs to accurately reflect each component for this mode of delivery. Basic costs such as printing, mailing out materials and resources to students, the need for physical equipment and resources at the school of distance education site so that appropriate facilities are in place

for when students come together at the school, and the ability to provide free daily contact with the school via internet and/or phone should be included as part of the resource funding budget.

Recognition for the distance education tutor:

With greater demands being placed on families and the need for a home tutor to be present to supervise, assist and ensure daily schoolwork is completed, it is vital that the role of distance education home tutor be recognised. This role takes the tutor, (often the mother), out of paid employment and away from other commitments to business and family and may necessitate the employment of additional staff. Funding already available for education could and should be redirected to support ICPA's proposed \$4,000 per year Distance Education Teaching Allowance for the 1,500 isolated families who must educate their children via distance education.

Internet Services:

Access to efficient internet services is paramount to the success of the distance education program. Families in some states bear much of the access and usage costs of internet services required for their children to undertake distance education. For students enrolled in a school of distance education, internet access for their daily interactive lessons is a key requirement and families should not be charged with meeting this access cost. This cost of provision should be considered when allocating funding to all distance education schools.

ICPA thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit to the inquiry into the Australian Education (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill and looks forward to future opportunities for consultation. ICPA are happy to provide more detail should the committee require any further information.