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

FEDERAL COUNCIL

"Access to Education"

Submission

to the

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees

on the

Australian Education Bill 2012

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), appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the provisions of the Australian Education Bill 2012 and is pleased to provide comment. ICPA supports the commitment that ensures all Australian children can equitably access a high quality education.

ICPA represents families who live in rural and remote Australia. Our goal is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for all geographically isolated children and thus ensure they have access to a continuing and appropriate education determined by their aspirations rather than their location. ICPA seeks to have all elements of education, i.e. academic systems, cultural experiences, social contacts, participation in sport and enrichment activities, available to children regardless of the location of their home. Due consideration must be given to factors which affect the delivery of and access to education for these children, factors which do not necessarily need to be considered within the context of metropolitan education.

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 distance education families and students. They too need to be recipients of the benefits of any reforms which take place.

The following critically important question remains unanswered:

Given that no direct recommendations have been made in the Review of Funding for Schooling for 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?

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 difficulty currently associated with providing distance education to their children, distance education should be recognised as separate, distinct and valid form of educational disadvantage. Therefore, should this component be acknowledged, some form of education funding loading is imperative. To achieve this, an additional sub-section needs to be included in the Bill's Section 9 (School Funding), as follows:

"Educational disadvantage associated with any of the following circumstances will be recognised and addressed through the providing additional recurrent funding in the form of loadings:

i) having a disability;
ii) being an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander;
iii) having low socio-economic status;
iv) not being proficient in English as the result of the ethnic background or immigration status of a student or a student's family; and
v) being enrolled in a recognised distance education program.

Distance Education for Rural and Remote Students

Despite school funding being reviewed, concerns continue 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 distance education to their children.

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 take into account each aspect of this mode of education, including basic costs such as printing, mailing out materials and resources to students, the need for some 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.

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 tutors 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 distance education. 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.

In summary, 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 must allow for the actual costs of providing students with the necessary materials and methods to undertake their education.**
- **Funding must be made available to recognise the unpaid work undertaken by home tutors.**
- **Funding formula must consider costs associated with the provision of suitable internet access to students**
- **The cost of provision of enrichment programs should be a part of school funding.**

ICPA thanks the committee for the opportunity to comment on the review of the Australian Education Bill 2012 and looks forward to future opportunities for consultation. Should the committee require any further information, ICPA would be happy to provide it.