



New Zealand Educational Institute (Inc.)

National standards – ensuring they work best for children’s learning

An NZEI Te Riu Roa briefing for MPs

September 2009

1. NZEI wants to see national standards implemented in a way that best supports teaching and learning. We support the Government’s goal of clearer reporting to parents and agree that parents have a right to know how their child is doing.

2. NZEI welcomes Education Minister Anne Tolley’s decision to extend the timeframe for the reporting of national standards until 2012, and are encouraged the profession’s concerns are being listened to. Teachers and principals want to get both implementation of the curriculum and national standards right so student learning isn't compromised.

3. The main issues for principals and teachers:

- Ensuring that the new curriculum, rather than the standards, drives teaching and learning
- Ensuring that the new curriculum is given time to bed-in before schools are overwhelmed by implementation of national standards. There has been concern that the pressure and reporting requirements for national standards could undermine the work being done on the curriculum.
- Ensuring national standards are set at appropriate levels for students and show progress, as well as achievement. Children enter school with very diverse experiences and skills – what is enormous progress for one child in a year will be something some children have achieved in their first term.
- Ensuring national standards include teachers’ professional judgment as well as standardised assessment tools. Effective assessment depends on both formal and informal interactions to provide evidence of progress and achievement – it is teachers’ judgments that can enrich mere statistics about a child’s attainment
- Concern about the negative impacts on schools and children’s learning of league tables based on centralised collation of data. . This can create an incorrect and unfair perception of “good” and “bad” schools, for example, reinforcing prejudice about the performance of students in low decile schools when the school may be having as good or better impact on the learning progress of its students as the “good” school. .

4. NZEI believes the test of any new system is whether it improves and motivates student learning.

NZEI supports	NZEI opposes
<p>“Rich” assessment focused on the individual student and their learning needs - assessment which allows a teacher to use their professional judgment and knowledge of the child as well as existing national assessment tools, such as PAT.</p>	<p>“High stakes” national testing where all children sit the same test at the same time and a child’s success or failure is based on a pass/fail mark.</p>
<p>Assessment which helps teachers, parents and the children themselves identify the child’s next learning steps and goals.</p>	<p>Tests that result in children as young as 5 being labeled as “failures”.</p>
<p>Reporting to parents and children in clear English so that families understand how their children are doing in relation to expectations of their year level.</p>	<p>Reducing the complex way and rate at which individual children learn – a child’s progress becomes focused on ranking, rather than their own individual learning progress.</p>
<p>Being accountable to the local community by keeping parents, Boards of Trustees and others up to date with where things are going well and where improvement is needed.</p>	<p>Central collation in Wellington of data from each school – potentially resulting in “league tables” of school results being published. This can create an incorrect and unfair perception of “good” and “bad” schools, for example, reinforcing prejudice about the performance of students in low decile schools when the school may be having as good or better impact on the learning progress of its students as the “good” school.</p>

5. What NZEI wants

- Decision makers who are well informed about teaching and learning as it takes place in classrooms now. Please take the time to visit your local schools and watch teaching and learning in practice - NZEI members are happy to assist you in making appointments with your local schools.
- An assurance that there will be “safe warehousing” of data from national standards to prevent the production of league tables of schools because of the harm they would do to children’s learning.