

August 21 2008/6e

Kia ora, greetings to you all.

Dear Lobby Network Activist

NZEI LOBBY PACK FOR TERM THREE

There are two issues covered in this lobby pack, depending on whether your MP is a Government or National Party MP.

FOCUS 1: FAIR PAY FOR SUPPORT STAFF: For those of you in Government electorates, our urgent priority is to get fair pay increases for school support staff in line with the \$2.62 hour increase school cleaners are likely to get shortly. Many of you may have already emailed or faxed Dr Cullen's office, but we need to widen our effort to all Government MPs as the Government has yet to make a positive response on this issue.

FOCUS 2: For those of you in electorates with sitting National MPs, NZEI is asking you to seek clarification and further details from National about their education and employment policies as these remain sketchy so far.

Details of these issues follow below.

REMINDER: VOTER REGISTRATION

We'd like to remind you about the importance of enrolling to vote. There are currently 269,000 people not enrolled to vote – you can check out the exact number of people in your electorate not enrolled at <http://www.elections.org.nz/ages/>

You can help promote voter enrolment by:

- asking to have a small display about voter enrolment at your school or centre – use a few orange and black balloons to highlight voter enrolment forms available from your nearest NZ PostShop or from Stephanie.mills@nzei.org.nz.
- asking your principal or head teacher to remind the families of new student enrolments – people who have just moved house will need to register their new details

More information on voter registration is at www.elections.org.nz

CALENDAR OF NZEI ACTIVITIES UP TO THE ELECTION

You can download a calendar of NZEI activities, including “Meet the Candidates” forums, running up to November at

http://www.nzei.org.nz/election_2008/elections_getinvolved.htm

If you want to know more or help out, contact your District Council election coordinator listed at

http://www.nzei.org.nz/election_2008/elections_getinvolved.htm.

LOBBY PACK DETAILS

PROCESS:

NZEI urges you to make an appointment with your MP now to meet as soon as possible. In the meantime, contact your lobby convenor and/or your field officer who will help support you prepare for this visit. You can also download materials to support your lobbying at: www.nzei.org.nz/get_involved/LobbyNetwork.htm

ACTION BY YOU:

Please read the summaries of the issues (below) and take copies of the one relevant to your MP with you when you visit your MP to leave with them. Both these documents are available at

www.nzei.org.nz/get_involved/LobbyNetwork.htm

Your branch is committed to supporting you as a lobbyist so either talk to your field staff about getting the funding necessary to make photocopies or take a note about the amount of photocopying you've done and approach the branch to pay either you or your worksite.

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR MP

- Explain the positions in these documents have been endorsed by NZEI's Annual Meeting, when representatives of our 49,000 members met in September last year.
- Explain that NZEI is extremely disappointed that the Government's stated commitment to address low pay has not so far resulted in a positive solution for school support staff.
- Identify examples from your own experience about the problems with the low pay (but essential work!) that support staff face so that you can give some concrete examples from your area to your MP. We encourage you to include support staff members who can speak from direct experience of these issues in your visit to your MP.
- Ask your MP what their party's current policy is on school operations grant funding, including tagging of funds for core support staff positions. Ask your MP what their party intends to do to address low pay for support staff.
- Ensure your MP's response is reported back to NZEI.

Thank you for your time and effort in progressing this work. Please contact your field officer to discuss further preparation of your meeting. Don't hesitate to get

in touch with Shelley Hughes or Stephanie Mills at National Office if you have any enquiries.

Best wishes

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BRIEFINGS FOR LOBBYISTS (These are also available as word documents at http://www.nzei.org.nz/get_involved/LobbyNetwork.htm)

FAIR PAY FOR TEACHER AIDES, SCHOOL OFFICE STAFF AND OTHER SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

NZEI Briefing August 2008

The Minister of Education has indicated that school cleaners may shortly settle their collective agreement which NZEI understands will raise the minimum rate for school cleaners from \$12.00 per hour to \$14.62 per hour. This is a \$2.62 an hour pay increase.

NZEI understands the Government is prepared to provide additional funding to cover the pay increases for cleaners. For example, the Minister of Education is quoted as saying in the NZ Herald on 1 August:

"I can give an assurance that the Government is committed to addressing the issues of low pay in the school sector".

The \$2.62 increase would bring school cleaners in line with increases won recently for hospital cleaners by the Service and Food Workers union. NZEI congratulates the Service and Food Workers Union for their campaign so far.

However, NZEI thinks a Government that is committed to addressing low pay should not fix the situation for one group of workers in schools while some of their support staff colleagues remain on rates as low as \$12.69 an hour.

For example, a teacher aide who may be working with special needs children and have 10 years experience working a full school day is commonly paid for five hours per day, 25 hours a week. The top step of their grade A scale is \$13.53 an hour. They get 44 weeks pay if they work a complete year: they do not get paid in term breaks or in the Christmas holidays. That person's annual earnings are \$14,883.

In this scenario, the person could be leaving home at 8.30 to go to work and getting home at 4pm. They effectively work "split shifts" – from 9am-12.30pm

then 1.30- 3pm. They may only be paid until 3pm but it is rare that they can leave then – they just go on to an unpaid half hour or so talking to parents, getting the child into a taxi or bus, cleaning up or preparing for the next day.

Schools are already struggling with funding to pay for enough teacher aides, administrative support and special needs support. Attracting and retaining skilled and committed staff will be increasingly difficult if wage rates remain this low.

How to fix the situation

NZEI is asking the government to provide identifiable new funding for schools so they can address the low pay issues for support staff. This would also restore a sensible and practical relativity between the rate of pay for a cleaner and that of, for example, a teacher aide or administration staff member. Providing that additional funding would also help to address schools' recruitment and retention difficulties when it comes to being able to attract and keep the skilled support staff they require.

The funding could be given to school support staff as part of a variation to their current collective agreement.

There is widespread support in the primary sector to urgently address this unfair situation with regard to support staff pay.

CLARIFYING NATIONAL PARTY EDUCATION AND EMPLOMENT POLICY

NZEI Briefing August 2008

The National Party has announced a number of policies in relation to education and employment, but details remain sketchy or contradictory in some key areas. It is in National's interests to be open about their policies: in a recent TVNZ poll (19 August 2008), half the voters questioned did not believe that National was being open about its plans and only 37 percent said it was.

1. School funding

National says it will announce its policy on school funding when the election campaign proper begins. Education spokesperson Anne Tolley has told NZEI's National Executive (see Rourou, July 2008) that National would only increase the school operations grant by the rate of inflation. She has also said that any additional funding for "front line" costs would come from cutting policy analysts from the Ministry of Education.

However, she and associate education spokesperson Allan Peachey have also been quoted (Howick and Pakuranga Times, 31 July 2008) as saying "Added support for boards of trustees is also on the cards, with a plan to give principals more of a say in the direction of a school along with extra funding".

Please ask your National MP:

- Schools across New Zealand are in agreement that even with increases above inflation (eg last Budget 5% increase), the operations grant is insufficient to meet their needs. This is most obvious in terms of the situation of school support staff who face low pay and job insecurity, but who are vital to the functioning of schools. Will National increase the operations grant significantly? What is the estimated savings from cuts to the Ministry of Education and how would these savings be applied to schools?
- The education sector has clearly rejected bulk funding, and National has publicly said it has dumped the policy. What therefore does National mean by saying it will make funding more flexible?

2. 90 Day “Fire at Will” policy

Under National’s “90 day probationary period” proposal, an employer need give no reason for firing someone in worksites of less than 20 people. That means that if you moved to a new job, you would have no right to appeal unfair dismissal. National argues that this will help young, inexperienced people or new immigrants get jobs, although unemployment figures in May were 17,465 – compared with 161,128 people when they were last in government in 1999. National has informally suggested that this policy would not apply to primary teachers (but would cover support staff and ECE teachers), but this has not been confirmed in writing to NZEI. The Employment Relations Act already allows probationary employment but while maintaining rights of appeal for the new worker. NZEI believes the 90 day period would increase recruitment problems in rural areas and Auckland, reduce mobility and therefore career opportunities for people working in education, and be fundamentally unfair.

Please ask your National MP:

- Will the 90 day policy include primary teachers?
- How will the policy help recruitment of ECE teachers and support staff, areas where the sector is currently struggling to recruit quality staff? Why would anyone move to a new position and uproot their families, sell a house etc if they risked losing their job within 3 months?

3. National standards or national testing?

National has said it no longer supports national testing for students at 7, as it proposed in the 2005 election. Instead, it proposes that students meet national standards and it has suggested the use of existing assessment tools such as literacy progressions and AsTL. However, in a recent speech, John Key said: “We will set national standards in literacy and numeracy for all primary school pupils. We will require schools to test to see if kids are meeting the standards. We will require teachers to tell parents about the results – in plain English. And we will require schools to do something about it when kids are below standard.” Please ask your MP:

- How does Mr Key’s descriptions of national standards differ from national

testing?

- How will National “require” schools to “do something about it” – is he talking about using funding mechanisms, or punitive approaches or some other mechanism?

4. Public private partnerships (PPPs)

In October 2007, National leader John Key proposed allowing private sector companies to build and own state schools. Companies would buy land and build schools and then rent the school back to the Government. Critics say this would increase the cost to the taxpayer long term because the company would want to make a profit. It would reduce the control school communities have over their own facilities and could create problems for the maintenance and upkeep of schools.

Please ask your National MP:

- Does National’s commitment to public private partnerships in developing infrastructure include PPPs to build new schools and/or take on maintenance contracts?