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## **REVIEW PROVES VALUE OF FRONTLINE SCHOOL STAFF**

A just released report into Operational Funding and non-teaching staff in schools highlights the increasingly important role of frontline school support staff and underlines their claim for fairer pay.

The Ministry of Education's "Review of Schools' Operational Funding: Non-Teaching Staff Workforce Final Report" was completed in 2007 and has finally been made public. The education sector union NZEI Te Riu Roa applauds the government for releasing the report.

School support staff are among the lowest paid workforces in the country, yet the report identifies the wide range of tasks they perform and says the skill sets they need have become increasingly complex over time.

NZEI President Frances Nelson says support staff such as teacher aides are at the frontline of education in terms of teaching and learning, working with some of the most vulnerable and challenging children. The report also makes the point that principals need highly effective administrative support so they can concentrate on being professional leaders in their schools.

Support staff are still waiting for the government to get to the bargaining table to negotiate a new employment agreement which they hope will address funding and low pay issues.

"This report should give the government a strong message that, regardless of the current economic circumstances, addressing the low pay of support staff is a long overdue obligation. They deserve to be valued for the work they do and have the increasing demands of their jobs recognised," says Ms Nelson.

There are also serious issues around job security as support staff are bulk funded through the school operations grant and many schools struggle to find adequate funding to pay them. There are now more than three times as many support staff employed in schools as there was a decade ago.

Ms Nelson says it is disappointing that the report does not include the recommendations of the review's advisory group that the support staff funding model be revisited.

"Bulk funding of support staff is the prime cause of lack of job security and low rates of pay in the sector and a better resourcing system must be developed – that's a view shared by many other groups in the sector," she says.

The findings of the review point to a need for further research into current practices for teacher aides, covering qualifications, tasks, hours, pay and complexity of tasks. Frances Nelson says NZEI will be making it clear that it would like to be involved in any such work.

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