

## **SCHOOLING STRATEGY – NZEI PRINCIPALS’ COUNCIL SUBMISSION**

**NZEI Principals’ Council response to the second stage of the Ministry of Education’s plans for a 5 year schooling strategy, *Making a Bigger Difference for All Students: Directions for a Schooling Strategy.***

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**NZEI PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE SECOND STAGE OF  
THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S PLANS FOR A 5 YEAR SCHOOLING  
STRATEGY, MAKING A BIGGER DIFFERENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS:  
DIRECTIONS FOR A SCHOOLING STRATEGY.**

**1. Introduction**

NZEI is the professional organisation and industrial union that represents the interests and issues of its 43,500 members which includes over 2, 000 principals.

The NZEI Principals' Council is comprised of twenty seven principals representing each of the twelve NZEI District Councils and also includes representatives from other national primary principals associations. The Principals' Council is making this submission on behalf of NZEI.

NZEI supports a strategic approach to the delivery of education in New Zealand and welcomes the opportunity to comment on the second phase of the Ministry's Directions for a Schooling Strategy. To this end the NZEI Principals' Council has carried out extensive consultation and discussion both within the Council and in focus meetings with groups of principals in Invercargill, Auckland and Wellington. A number of Council members were involved in the Ministry of Education's Schooling Strategy summit meetings held throughout the country. A Ministry of Education officer attended a Council meeting and reported on the summit meetings, answered questions and listened to comments from Council members.

The Council believes that the strategic objectives of *Improving Student Outcomes*, and *Effective Teaching* encapsulate the core business of the school and has focused on responding to these objectives in some detail. Although the Council is very supportive of the critical role that parents, whanau and their communities play in encouraging student achievement and frequently refers to the role of family and whanau throughout the submission, it felt that it was important and appropriate for families and whanau to respond to the strategic objective and priorities that focuses on nurturing children's learning and having higher expectations for their ongoing learning. The role of families and whanau having high aspirations for their children's educational success and actively supporting this by valuing education and ensuring students attend school regularly and are in a "fit state to learn" is critical.

On a broader level the role that society plays in valuing education and ensuring the profession of teaching is valued and respected is also important

## **2. Directions for moving forward**

For the Schooling Strategy to be successful there needs to be:

A reduced number of priorities that are clearly and simply communicated to the whole sector in a way that makes sense, has buy in from the practitioners in schools and are seen as manageable. This could be achieved by a more strategic and phased in implementation of the priorities.

Realistic resourcing of the agreed priorities

Close consultation with both practitioners and researchers as to how best to support and achieve these priorities. There needs to be a high degree of trust and professional responsibility at all levels which allows for diversity, freedom and innovation within schools.

A commitment by all engaged in the education sector that these are the main priorities for an agreed number of years.

There needs to be alignment within all areas of the Ministry of Education to support and facilitate these priorities.

There must be political commitment not to alter or complicate the Strategy by introducing additional initiatives and requirements of schools that are not aligned to the agreed priorities.

## **3. Key Comments and Observations**

The Council commends the Ministry of Education in endeavouring to make the development of a schooling strategy a collaborative process with a positive focus on achievement. The Council noted a degree of overlap between some of the objectives, priorities and questions in the phase two document. This inter-linking of objectives and priorities has at times resulted in some repetition in responses to some of the questions.

Concern was expressed that there were too many priorities and the focus should be on things that really make a difference. The Council felt that priorities should be based on what schools are doing now as a means of identifying the things that need to be changed.

For the schooling strategy to be effective the focus must be on the priorities that most directly relate to the core business of the school and that is effective teaching.

To ensure a successful outcome for the Schooling Strategy there must be realistic funding provided to enable the priorities to be implemented.

The Council felt it is important that the schooling strategy should not exist in isolation from other education and societal issues such as special education, employment policies, immigration, and concerns associated with the current rural decline. It was strongly felt that schools should not be expected to address all social issues.

Ongoing professional learning for teachers and principals should be a top priority.

There should be alignment and congruency between the MoE and other sector programmes and priorities that will lead to a shared commitment and philosophy.

The Council noted a lack of reference to the role of the principal as the educational leader and the relationship that effective educational and professional leadership by the principal has in ensuring quality teaching. While the role of the principal as educational leader may well be implied in the priorities, the Council felt that importance of the role and its relationship to effective teaching cannot be underestimated and needs to be acknowledged as such.

The main focus appears to be on the classroom teacher and an implication that they are solely responsible for improving student achievement. The Council believes that the influence of the Principal in ensuring there is quality teaching in the school needs to be more directly acknowledged

4. **The major goal of the Schooling Strategy – Excellence and Equity of Outcomes for All Students**

The concept of developing a schooling strategy based on the goal of attaining excellence and equity of outcomes for all students was supported by the Council and the other principals involved in the consultation process.

The Council however, believes that terms such as ‘excellence’ and ‘equity of outcomes’ are open to a variety of interpretations and need to be clearly defined in order to achieve a shared understanding.

There also needs to be an understanding of, and agreement on, what resourcing would actually be needed to achieve equity of outcomes for all and where this resourcing should be targeted. Equity of outcomes requires unequal inputs. This is especially relevant and important given the diverse nature of the students that attend our schools and the ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor within our society.

For equity of outcomes to become a reality in schools it is imperative that issues of equity in society be seriously addressed and alignment and coherence between the schooling strategy and other government initiatives is essential. Intersectoral support for and alignment with the priorities is essential.

5. **Strategic Objective – Improving Student Outcomes:**

***Question 1a – How can we strengthen the approaches that benefit all learners?***

*Diverse Learners:*

There appears to be some variation as to how the term *diverse* is interpreted. The Council believes the emphasis should be on **all** students and their diverse needs; every student is an individual and has particular needs.

*Identifying what works:*

In order to strengthen approaches that benefit all students and lead to the improvement of student outcomes it is necessary to have a clear idea of the types of approaches that actually do work and have proven to be successful.

This is a critical first step that will facilitate being able to identify and then prioritise what needs to be done in terms of professional development and training, and the resources required to implement and sustain change.

The Council considers professional development and training to be a high priority.

*Curriculum and resources:*

The crowded, subject based curriculum and the plethora of additional requirements that schools are expected to deliver to students places unrealistic expectations on classroom teachers and can have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning.

Having a differentiated curriculum for all learners is seen as being highly desirable by many principals and a means of meeting the needs of a diverse range of students. To successfully implement this would require specific resources to be provided and a reduction in class sizes.

Resourcing such as ORRs, TFEA and SEG is currently provided to assist in improving outcomes for some students however there are no similar resources available to target the needs of higher achievers although it is a requirement for schools to cater for the particular needs of these students.

*Management of student behaviour:*

Principals are very concerned about the negative impact of students who exhibit extreme behaviour on the learning and well being of other students. Teachers have to spend too much time on class management issues created by badly behaved students. More support is needed to manage and assist the increasing numbers of students exhibiting extreme behaviour disorders that in many cases cannot be managed even by very experienced and capable teachers. Often there are simply no resources available to support the teacher in these situations. The mix of needs is constantly changing and resources need to be flexible and able to be adapted to provide the most appropriate support. Models of resource teacher support which currently exist are often unable to meet what is required.

*Assisting students with special needs:*

The Council believes that resourcing for students who have special needs should be regarded separately from assistance provided to manage students who have behavioural problems that are directly related to societal issues. The Council also believes that resourcing for both special needs and behaviour management should be increased to enable schools to better meet the needs of these students.

**Question 1b – How can schools demonstrate students are developing desired skills, attitudes, values, and identity, as well as knowledge?**

**Assessing student performance and development**

Regular monitoring and assessment of students' knowledge and the development of desired skills, attitudes, values and a sense of self identity can be undertaken in a variety of ways.

- Teachers' professional judgement
- Using a range of nationally validated assessment tools such as NEMP, asTTle and ARBs.
- Problem solving activities can be used to gauge level of performance as part of a holistic and collaborative approach
- There needs to be both qualitative and quantitative data used to demonstrate progress in the above areas.
- Formative and summative assessment both have an important role
- Use of a range of other assessment strategies such as peer assessment, self assessment, feedback from families and communities.

It needs to be recognised that there are difficulties in being able to quantify students' attitudes and values or indeed in some cases be able to even gain consensus on what constitutes desirable attitudes and values.

*The influence of the home*

The Council acknowledged that the home environment of a student plays a major part in shaping their attitudes and values. The Council accepts that the school needs to know about and have an understanding of the culture of its community and the values and expectations that exist in the students' home environments. The Council also noted that sometimes the attitudes and values that are accepted or promoted within some homes are at variance to the expectations of the school and other sectors within the community.

One of the challenges the Council identified was to explore ways of engaging the "disengaged" families/whanau. This will require additional time, personnel and resourcing. Home liaison officers, Social Workers in School were suggested as possible ways of meeting this challenge. It was emphasised that such personnel need high level interpersonal skills plus a good understanding/knowledge of schools and the education system.

*Teachers' professional judgement*

Attitudes, values and identity are closely related to the culture of the school and are not as readily "measured" as more discrete aspects of knowledge and skills. The professional judgement of teachers is a critical element in this area.

Teachers' professional knowledge and judgement is acquired and developed through the experience, observation, knowledge and reflection that is developed and refined throughout one's teaching career. Professional judgement is informed through observation and interaction with students and colleagues and plays a very important role in assessing the progress and development of students.

## **Question 1c – How will we know we are making progress?**

### **Indicators of progress**

Note: This is closely linked to strategies outlined in 1b.

#### **Some expected indicators would be:**

- Students who are motivated and engaged in their learning
- Regular attendance and positive participation at school
- Students are happy and enjoy being at school
- Students experiencing success and a sense of achievement and self-worth
- Less behavioural issues in schools – positive school climate
- Students who are secure and confident with well developed social skills
- Students who are proud of their own cultural/ethnic heritage
- Students who demonstrate an appreciation for and understanding of others
- Positive relationships between staff, students and parents reflecting a consistency of understanding and support for the schools vision, values and processes.

There is no single answer to how schools will be able to show they are making progress in the areas of knowledge, skills attitudes and values. The “evidence” will be gleaned from a range of sources and strategies. In order to do this well it is necessary to have the resources and support to enable this to happen.

#### *General Comments on Improving Student Outcomes:*

In considering how to improve learning outcomes for all students the Council noted the links between this and the strategic objective and associated priorities concerned with the influence families and whanau have on the learning and achievement of students. The development of ‘home expectations’ is crucial in making a sustainable impact on student learning. This can be fostered by lots of communication and conversations with parents.

The National Education Guidelines requires schools to consult with their communities and that school practices and policies should reflect the values, attitudes and skills set down in prescribed curriculum statements. While the consultation process enables schools to work with families and whanau to promote and encourage agreed values and attitudes, tension can occur when agreement is unable to be reached between the government/school’s desired values and those of the school community.

## **6. Strategic Objective – Effecting Teaching (Question 2).**

General Comments on this objective:

- The Council believes that effective teaching is about what teachers know and do; good teachers do make a significant difference but cannot do this alone and need to be supported in the work they do.
- Students/teachers/principals/families are linked as a partnership of ‘key players’.

- Effective teachers focus on teaching and have high expectations for their students. The effectiveness of their teaching is measured by the difference they make to students learning and development.
- Comprehensive preparation for teaching, sound pedagogical knowledge, ongoing professional learning and the ability to affirm and develop student identity are critical factors that underpin effective teaching.
- Identification of inhibitors that impede effective teaching is an important step in being able to provide the necessary professional training and support that is required to develop the teacher's ability to become more effective.
- "Conditions" in which teachers work and students learn have a direct impact on teaching/learning effectiveness.

## 7. Priority 1 – Ongoing Professional Learning

### **Question 3a – *What type of professional learning and development is most effective?***

Effective professional learning and development should involve the whole school and/or a cluster of smaller schools; it should be long term, sustained development and have facilitators who are well trained, confident and able to model good practice in the classroom. The credibility factor of facilitators is crucial.

Effective professional learning needs to be well resourced, sustained over time and should include credible facilitation, in school modelling, peer support, feedback, evaluation and ongoing contact with the facilitator

Having a 'whole school' focus and the development of collegial support would appear to be important elements of effective professional learning.

It was noted that the loss of advisers has created a loss of expertise that once was readily available to teachers and concern was expressed about the supply and provision of capable facilitators.

The Council supported a shift away from the 'one course' model but also believed there should be provision for people to undertake development to achieve personal goals.

Further comment on effective types of professional learning and development:

- The numeracy project was seen as a very effective and relevant form of professional development, however disappointment was expressed by some people at the time it took to get on to the project. It was felt that sufficient funding should have been made available to ensure that all schools had equitable access to the project. In some cases the excessive time taken to roll out this initiative has meant that in some situations the whole staff may have changed during or following the course. This has resulted in situations where the 'school' may have had the development but the original staff had since moved on and none of the current staff have been involved.

- Specialists should be trained to work in specific areas of the school or with particular people within the school. eg there should be junior, middle and senior school advisers as well as advisers to support year 1 and 2 teachers and their tutor teachers.
- Some principals recalled the impact and difference that programmes such as ERIC and LARIC had made and suggested that these programmes needed to be revised and re-implemented.
- The AtoL contract is also very good but one year is not sufficient and the programme is too broad and does not allow for choice of focus.

**Question 3b – *What are the areas of knowledge, skill, practice and beliefs in which professional development is most pressing?***

School principals and their staff are the best people to determine the professional learning programmes according to the learning needs of their students. The importance of the professional learning of the principal should never be underestimated or under resourced. The value of initiatives such as First Time Principals Training, Principals Professional Learning Communities and the PDPC were acknowledged. However it would be fair to say that there is still some degree of reservation surrounding the model of professional learning involved in the PDPCs. Early initiatives in the area of professional development for aspiring/potential principals was acknowledged and promoted because this develops a larger cadre of professional leaders. Issues of time to pursue sustained professional learning and workload issues for principals will need to be seriously addressed if this element of principals professional learning is to be addressed. Currently the Principals personal and professional well-being is at risk.

Areas needing professional development will vary from school to school and will depend on where a school 'is at' at a given time and what the particular needs of the students may be. This is also the case for Principals who are also at different stages of development in principalship. Professional development must be needs based and take into account school priorities as well as national priorities.

The provision of professional development to up-skill teachers in the use of exemplars as tools that supported effective classroom teaching practice was seen as a pressing need.

The Council believed that a focus on the basics of literacy, numeracy and behaviour should be retained as a major element of professional development programmes but also supported schools being able to make their own decisions about their professional development training requirements in order to meet their specific needs.

The problems created by inappropriate student behaviour and the need for teachers to be provided with additional support were repeatedly mentioned during discussions.

Other points that were made in relation to professional communities were:

- The school leader's 'vision' constantly needs to be expanded.
- Beginning teacher time needs to be used correctly and effectively.
- Professional development costs need to be budgeted for, including the cost of providing release time.
- Disparities between different regions in terms of being able to afford to fund professional development needs to be taken into account. (eg The Invercargill Licensing Trust provides generous funding)
- Being located in isolated areas creates many additional costs and impacts on being able to participate in some professional development opportunities.

**Question 3c – How can teachers and principals participate in professional communities which contribute to sustained improvements in student outcomes?**

The Council believes the principal is pivotal to the success of professional learning communities. They are the lynchpin between national policies, local aspirations and the learning programmes that staff believe are most important for their students.

The Council believed that schools should have control over their own professional development arrangements and whereas it should not be mandatory for schools to work as part of a cluster there are already examples of some of this working well. Schools need to have ownership of their professional development and the principal's role is to facilitate the sense of ownership with their staff.

- The School Administration Support Clusters (SASC) scheme was suggested by a group of principals as providing a good example of schools combining to participate as a professional community. This scheme creates opportunities for schools to shape their own topics and employ a facilitator to lead sessions.
- Others suggested using the very successful and popular Principal Professional Learning Community (PPLC) project as a model that could be adapted to create effective teacher professional learning communities. (TPLC).

The Council believed the leadership of the principal was critical in encouraging and helping to facilitate successful professional development programmes. The school would grow professionally as the school leaders grew and developed a vision for the school that was shared by both the principal, teachers and the community.

Being involved with a university and immersed in professional learning was seen as yet another way in which teachers and principals could participate in a professional learning community. Partnerships with universities appear to be somewhat ad hoc and the Council believes that there is potential for further work in this area. The Teaching Learning Research Initiatives were seen as a valuable because it encourage evidenced based inquiry and action and values both research and practice.

**Question 3d – *What are the implications of this priority for school boards?***

Boards of Trustees recognise that Staff are the most valuable resource in the school. It is imperative that Boards of Trustees have an understanding of the importance and need to have an ongoing staff professional development programme and the cost of this should be adequately budgeted for. It is important that the Principal keeps the BoT well informed of this priority.

**Question 3e – *How will we know if we are making progress?***

The profile of the principal as professional leader will be recognised at both local and national level and the capacity and capability of principals as professional leaders will be evident across the education sector. Principals will be seen as a desirable career path opportunity.

Possible indicators of progress:

- When there is evidence of positive things happening in schools/ classroom.
- Through the development of shared understanding and continuity of effective teaching practice throughout the school.
- When it begins to show in school values and through the expression of shared beliefs, the development of a “we believe in” attitude.
- When other schools ask to visit in order to meet with staff and observe and discuss at first hand the positive things that are happening within the school.
- Principals support the view that teachers own assessment of the value of the professional development should be given due cognisance.

**Question 3f – *Is there support for this priority?***

Yes - the Council rated this as an extremely high priority believing that the ongoing professional learning of teachers and principals is a critical factor in developing effective teaching and improving student learning outcomes.

**8. Priority 2 – Comprehensive Preparation for Teaching**

**Question 4a – *What areas of knowledge, skill, practice and belief need to be strengthened the most for beginning teachers?***

Many principals felt strongly that the selection and initial teacher education in New Zealand has been adversely affected the market model and this has resulted in too much variability in the preparation for teaching.

The following points were seen as being critical considerations:

- The present situation is viewed from a market economy perspective and driven by economics. There are too many providers and too much variation within the provision of pre-service teacher education. There needs to be more alignment between what is happening at the college of education/university and the school where the teaching practice is taking place. There are some good existing models of this alignment
- Preparation for teaching is a complex job and cannot be achieved in a compressed time. NZEI policy is that pre-service education for teaching needs to be a four year professional qualification

- There were reservations expressed about preparation for teaching when it is provided through distance education unless it is supported with opportunities for interaction and professional discussion . Current experiences with on-line discussion has exposed the limitations this has. A mechanism is required that will allow for in-depth and rich discussion which are vital aspects for a profession which requires quality interaction with colleagues and the building of professional networks.
- A beginning teacher in a primary school is required to teach all areas of the NZ Curriculum. Beginning teachers need to be well prepared and familiar with a whole range of strategies and pedagogical practices that meet the diverse learning and behaviour needs of their students
- The current funding system based on EFTs has the capacity to compromise quality at entry point of training.
- The importance of dispositional qualities in selection of candidates for teaching was highlighted by Principals.
- Skills in the area of classroom organisation and the management of student behaviour was identified as an area that beginning teachers often find challenging.
- Teaching practice was identified as a vital component of pre-service teacher education.

The role of the associate teacher was seen as critical in assisting in the preparation for teaching. Council members also identified the need for the parameters of the responsibility of the associate teacher to be clearly defined. to avoid confusion between the roles of the school/associate teacher and the provider. Both have specific roles to fulfil while the student is on practicum.

**Question 4b – *Strengthening the links between initial teacher education and support for beginning teachers.***

Principals acknowledged there were difficulties in making and strengthening these links but that it was important for schools to have some form of partnership programme with the providers that could possibly extend into the beginning teachers first two years of teaching.

Other points made:

- There was support for the principle of having advisers running courses for beginning teachers and tutor teachers. The importance of the role of the tutor teacher needs to be recognised and supported by the provision of professional development.
- Mentoring of beginning teachers was seen as a key factor in providing support.

**Question 4c – *How do we ensure that teachers who support student teachers and beginning teachers are well prepared for their roles?***

Principals are the link between initial teacher education institutions and the schools in which students are placed. Where there are links and partnerships between Teacher Education providers and schools it has proved to be effective in addressing the continuity needs of the two groups.

The following points were noted in relation to providing support for student teachers and beginning teachers:

- Time needs to be provided to enable tutor teachers to carry out their role and responsibilities.
- Tutor teachers need to be trained for the role, they are teaching other adults not students.
- The level of payment should reflect the importance of the role and the experience and skills required to be an effective tutor/associate teacher.
- The Teachers Council folder ('Towards Full Registration') is inadequate.
- More support material for the tutor/associate teacher is needed within schools.
- There are advantages in deputy principals now being able to be paid as tutor teachers. This will increase the pool of experienced teachers available to undertake the roles of associate/tutor teachers.

**Question 4d – *How will we know we are making progress?***

- Principals will report a high level of satisfaction with beginning teachers
- There will be evidence of the development of reflective practitioners.
- The beginning teachers themselves will have sense of confidence and efficacy and recognition that they have been well prepared for the role

**4e – *Support for this priority?***

There was strong support for this priority as comprehensive preparation for teaching was seen as a crucial link in the ongoing development and motivation of a teacher.

9. **Priority 3 - Affirming and Developing Student Identity**

**Question 5a – *How do we know if the experiences and identities of students are being affirmed in their schooling and that this is supporting their learning outcomes?***

The Council agreed that schools already have many practices in place to affirm and develop student identity. The point was also made that the best way to develop and affirm student identity is by ensuring that they experience success at school.

Practices and strategies that could provide evidence to affirm the experiences and identities of students and thereby support their learning outcomes include:

- the importance of integrating into the curriculum a variety of contexts and learning experiences that reflect the diversity of the student body;
- an appreciation and valuing of cultures and backgrounds other than their own is important for teachers and principals;
- recognition that affirming, building and developing student identity re interconnected with student learning outcomes;
- celebration and acceptance of differences, ensuring that all children are acknowledged, accepted and involved;
- innovative programmes such as buddy systems and bullying programmes are implemented and monitored to gauge effectiveness;

- being aware of and sensitive towards students who do not appear to be accepted and involved;
- acknowledging each person's individuality, recognising occasions that are special to individuals such as birthdays and cultural events, and by continuing to sustain this throughout the year;
- incorporating these practices not only as part of social studies and health programmes but right across the board as part of 'the hidden curriculum';
- treating each person with respect as an individual and enhancing their self esteem;
- being aware of non-desirable aspects of a student's identity that should not be affirmed.

**Question 5b – *How can families and whanau contribute to this priority?*  
(See also Priority #6)**

The Council maintained that although this was an important priority it was noted that it was sometimes difficult getting families interested and involved.

Principals believed that many families were struggling to cope with economic and social pressures and these became barriers that prevented parents and whanau having the time and motivation to contribute to their children's experiences and the development of sense of identity.

Nonetheless, the Council recognised getting parents actively involved with the school would help parents understand how the school was trying to affirm and foster their child's identity and experiences.

Council members identified a range of activities that parents can engage in together with their children both within and outside of the school. Many of these activities are already occurring and are centred around:

- the need for families/whanau to clearly understand the importance of ensuring children experience, love, security, acceptance and a sense of self worth;
- utilising agencies outside the school to reinforce the importance of this priority e.g church groups, Pasifika networks, community education groups / PTFA/ NCW/ Rotary, Marae/Iwi based groups;
- providing significant role models.

**Question 5c – *How will we know we are making progress?***

Progress can be noted through:

- the positive culture of school and community;
- students displaying greater confidence and self esteem; they become more involved and interested in their schoolwork and generally behave in a positive manner;
- students learning about and practising being tolerant, respectful and accepting of differences;
- students who may appear vulnerable are not victimised but instead are accepted and participate fully and to the best of their ability in a wide range of classroom and playground activities;
- a sense of belonging and positive engagement with fewer dysfunctional/inappropriate behaviours.

Parents and whanau will be more actively involved in school related activities and the composition of Board of Trustees and PTA members reflects the social, cultural and ethnic makeup of the school's community.

**Question 5d – Support for this priority?**

There was support for the general thrust of this priority however there was also some question as to whether it needed to be specified as a national priority. Much of what this priority seeks to promote is already an integral part of the strategic objective aimed at improving outcomes for students and is referred to elsewhere in this paper.

Principals felt that primary schools already did affirm student identity well and there was no need to formalise something that was already happening

10. **Priority 4 – Strong School-Home Links**

**Question 6a – How do we build and use effective home-school links to assist in meeting student learning needs?**

There are already many home-school links as already discussed under question 5.

There were a range of strategies discussed by the Council but some were not suitable for all school communities. Inappropriate use of strategies could be counterproductive and may even be dangerous in some situations. This has also been recognised through legislation that requires police vetting of adults who are involved in school activities.

- The range of suggestions for building effective home-school links were schools having an open door policy.
- Home visits could be arranged.
- Technology could be used to keep parents informed of positive happenings and developments – cell-phone contact, e-mails and digital photos could provide opportunities to establish and strengthen links between the school and home.
- The school being involved in community social and cultural events.
- Utilising the skills, knowledge and interests of parents and other people in the community by providing opportunities for them to come into the school and to interact with students.
- Establishing and maintaining reasonable contact between home and school so that it is not only when there is a situation of concern arises that a parent hears from the school.
- Early intervention with regard to absenteeism, truancy and discipline issues.

There was some support for the reintroduction of a similar service to the 'visiting teacher'/home liaison officer service designed to provide a pastoral link between the home and the school. Some clusters of schools employ a truancy officer but a 'visiting teacher' who has a much broader brief may have more appeal.

Other matters that assist the above include:

- effective communication strategies and channels for communication School to home and vice versa;
- seeking feedback when appropriate;
- a welcoming school culture – positive reinforcement of all that is good;
- sound interpersonal skills of all staff and especially those in leadership;
- clear procedures for complaints/concerns to be addressed;
- ensure fairness, transparency and follow up in the above;
- early intervention when issues/problems arise;
- sound orientation procedures for new families and students;
- principal/teacher knowledge of the community in which they work;
- identification of key personnel in community groups.

**Question 6b – *How can other local ‘contributors’ provide support?***

Comments:

This was not seen as a ‘home/school link by some principals.

It was agreed that schools come under pressure to be involved in a variety of community activities but needed to retain their main focus on education matters.

The occasions when schools do receive support from ‘local contributors’ often arise through parents’ involvement in business or the workforce. There were some concerns expressed about schools being sponsored by commercial organisations. Many principals commented that if government funding was adequate there would be no need to seek such additional assistance.

**Question 6c – *How will we know if we are making progress?***

The degree of success achieved in developing and maintaining strong learning – focused links with families and whanau can be ascertained by considering the effectiveness of the suggestions as listed in 6a.

Indicators of this could include:

- feedback received from ‘talk in the community’;
- positive culture evident;
- parent satisfaction;
- absence of factions or high levels of complaints;
- consistency and alignment between home and school priorities;
- an increase in the amount of community interest, support and interaction with the school may be noted and could include offers of financial support and the donation of goods;
- an increase in the number of parents and outside organisations actively involved with the school sponsorship, school camps and class trips.

Much of the above is affected by socio-economic factors and may more readily be observed in some areas than others.

### **Question 6d – Support for this priority?**

The Council gives general support for the priority but it also needs to be noted that home/school links are important not as an end in themselves but because they play an important role in supporting the core business of the school.

The question was also raised ....is it the actual “link” per se that facilitates student learning or is it the aspirations for and valuing of education that the links engender. E.g Consider the achievement of Asian students and yet generally speaking Asian parents do not have a lot of direct links with the school.

## **11. Priority 5 – Using, Sharing and Developing Knowledge**

### **Question 7a – How can capability of teachers and others be strengthened to develop knowledge and practices to support learning of all students?**

The importance of the role of the Principal in enhancing and strengthening the professional capability of both themselves and their teachers is critical. This won't just “happen”. It needs to be planned, resourced and time provided for it. Links between research communities and the professional practitioners are important. Some valuable work being done in the Teaching Learning Research initiatives

A necessary prerequisite to this is attracting quality candidates to the profession. Teaching is a very complex and intellectual activity that requires people who are capable of undertaking rigorous and challenging work along with a high level of self efficacy and a strong set of social and interpersonal skills.

The Council also identified the importance of professional reading and keeping up to date with pedagogical knowledge and current research about teaching and learning

### **Question 7b – How will we know we are making progress?**

Teachers and principals are able to talk knowledgeably about professional practice and the rationale underpinning what they do.

A well qualified and respected profession that is able to engage in vigorous and enlightened debate.

Results will be seen through a range of student outcome indicators.

New Zealand teachers will be recognised internationally for their skills and expertise ( this is already fairly strong).

### **Question 7c – Is there support for this priority?**

Yes this priority was strongly supported, but it won't happen without a clear strategy that starts prior to candidates entering the profession and then builds in a cohesive and focused way at various stages in the careers of teachers and principals and provides the opportunities for members of the profession to develop and increase their capability both individually and collectively.

The Council noted the links to Priority 3 which was also strongly supported.

## **12. Strategic Objective – Families and Whanau**

*General comment:*

The Council considered that priority 6, 'Strong School- Home Links' should be included with priorities 8, 9 and 10 as it linked more directly to issues concerning families and whanau and was more about strengthening families.

The Council believes most parents are doing their best for their children at any given time, however schools' sometimes view matters differently to parents and such situations require open discussion to generate better understanding by both parties.

Principals accept that schools have an educative function to help families understand what is expected of them and their children to support learning. Supportive, caring and interested families contribute to the strength and success of the school.

The Council reiterated that the school's main function and area of expertise was to help students to read and write. Although schools can and do manage other issues up to a certain stage, there needs to be a well defined point at which another professional should take over. In order for this to happen there needs to be greater alignment and co-ordination of social services.

## **13. Priority 6 – Building Knowledge about Learning**

### **Question 9a – How are families and whanau actively supporting children's learning outside of school?**

The Council argued that there was a high level of variability in the degree to which families and whanau "actively" support children's learning. Range of reasons for variability were seen as:

- lack of knowledge and understanding as to "how";
- disengagement from education;
- other priorities;
- pace of modern life – finding time;
- work commitments.

The Council recognised that families and whanau can play an important role in actively supporting children's learning outside of school by taking an interest in what has been learned each day at school, by encouraging their child to talk about their future and their aspirations and by getting involved with their homework. Unfortunately television viewing, computer generated

games and other similar outside of school activities often dominates student time and energy thus eroding quality time that could be spent with their family.

**Question 9b – *How can others help families to provide active out of school support for their children’s learning?***

The Council was keen to learn who ‘others’ to whom the priority refers as it often falls onto the school to provide out-of-school support.

- Sports clubs, scouts, culture groups, libraries and church groups can and do provide active out of school support for student learning.

**Question 9c – *How will we know if progress is being made?***

- Disengaged children will become more engaged in learning.
- More cohesion between school and home expectations and priorities.
- Students’ attitudes become more positive.
- More families are interacting with the school.

**Question 9d – *Support for this priority?***

General support for this priority is given by the Council on the proviso that there is recognition that all of out-of-school support cannot be provided by the school. Building knowledge about learning is not a simple task, again requires time, focus and resourcing

14. **Priority 7 – Learning Focused Links with Teachers and Schools**

**Question 10a – *How are families and whanau maintaining relationships with schools which help teachers and schools to meet the learning needs of students?***

The Council acknowledged that a relationship of mutual trust and confidentiality between the school and families needed to be established and maintained. Families need to be encouraged to keep the school informed about happenings that occur outside of the school that could impact on students’ learning and well being.

**Question 10b - *How can others help families to establish effective relationships with schools that will help schools to meet the students needs?***

This question is similar to 9b. The Council’s had discussed the importance of role of SKILLED liaison people whether it was, for example, social workers, truancy officers, GSE personnel, home–school liaison personnel, health personnel, police education officers, RTL&Bs. All are important in building learning focused links between family, whanau, teachers and schools. Accessibility and ready availability of the above is often an issue for principals

**Question 10c – *How will we know if we are making progress?***

There will be:

- more cohesion between school and home;
- evidence of active support for student learning;
- interest in and attendance at educational evenings/discussion/school events etc;
- students will attend school regularly and arrive at school ready to learn;
- a reduction in “parent condoned” absenteeism.

**Question 10d – *Support for this priority?***

The Council supported this as a priority but once again felt that it should not be regarded in isolation from other aspects of a positive and constructive relationship with families and whanau.

15. **Priority 8 – Integrated Social Services:**

**Question 11a – *How best to mobilise and co-ordinate family and whanau support to allow schools to remain focused on teaching and learning?***

Principals identified a need for experienced and skilful personnel outside of the school to be responsible for co-ordinating support for families in need. They would need to strike the right balance between liaising with the school but also leaving the school free to focus on the core business of teaching and learning. Once again these support agencies need to be quickly and easily accessible to the school and the families. They should not involve heavy layers of bureaucratic requirements. Some major issues have been identified around the capability of CYF and school experience with this agency has resulted in a lack of confidence of its ability to support the school sector.

This failure to have adequate social services support available when required by schools and families was seen as a systems failure.

**Question 11d – *Is there support for this Priority?***

The Council identified this as a critical area that needed to be developed. Discussion was largely centred on how this had not been achieved and included such points as:

- the huge raft of students/families seeking/needing support;
- the lack of co-ordination of services, agencies have different ways of operating;
- schools are not resourced to tackle this problem and it should not be the role of the RTLB to co-ordinate these services;
- a suggestion of having a ‘one stop shop’ model suggests there being an overall provider with all of the resources based in one area. The concern is that this could develop sectionalised interests that would work against the success of such a model;
- there needs to be one person working within the school or on behalf of the school (a ‘liaison officer?’) who has responsibility for the co-ordination of the appropriate services required;
- having a social worker or someone in a role similar to that of the visiting teacher is an option that should be considered.

16. **Priority 9 – Evidence Based Investment**

**Question 12a – *How could we be assured that extra resourcing would contribute to improved student outcomes?***

Always some degree of difficulty in establishing direct and provable links between outcome and investment in an area as complex as teaching and learning however, we already know that quality teaching makes a big difference so any investment in that area must be worthwhile.

While additional resourcing centred around quality teaching should/will make a difference, the difference will only be really significant if the investment is aligned with other policies designed to address some of the economic, health and social issues we know impact negatively on student learning

It is reasonable for a government to require “evidence” that any investment in education is soundly based, however, the definition of “evidence” needs to be broad enough to include a comprehensive range of indicators and not focus disproportionately on a narrow range of “hard data”.

There also needs to be a preparedness to recognise that some of the most valuable “gains” in education take time and that a desire for almost instantaneous and “provable” outcomes can often be counterproductive.

Trust in the professional judgement of principals and teachers as to the “worth” of certain investment or initiatives needs to be valued and respected.



Liz Horgan  
Chairperson  
NZEI Principals Council

31 March 2005



Colin Tarr  
NZEI National President  
Te Manukura

31 March 2005

31 March 2005  
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