

Teachers Matter



NZEI · TE RĪU ROA
NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE

National Standards

National Standards

The Government has passed legislation empowering the Minister of Education to set national standards in literacy and numeracy.

As part of the implementation schools will be required to:

- regularly assess their students against national standards
- use assessment programmes that compare the progress of their students with other students across the country
- report to parents in “plain language” about how their child is doing compared to the set national standards and compared to other children of the same age
- provide parents, on request, with any assessment information collected about their child.

The Government claims this will raise achievement in the compulsory education sector.

Teachers know that there is a close and complex relationship between standards, effective assessment for learning, and pedagogy. All are central and integral to teaching and learning and teacher professional development. Will national standards help achieve agreement between these critical aspects of teachers’ work? What is the relationship with the Government’s requirement for national standards?

What is already happening?

The New Zealand Curriculum has been expressed in outcomes at different learning levels. These are a type of standard. Teachers have also been complementing their own assessment practices such as observation, conferencing, teacher-made tests with nationally validated tools for a long time (e.g. six year net, PATs, asTTle, ARBs, NEMP, Probe, Star). Schools are awash with data. There is a lot of analysis done, graphs drawn and conversations had.

So what is the problem?

The Education Review Office has found that not all teachers and schools are using the data they are collecting to inform changes to their teaching practices and, therefore, make a difference to each individual student’s learning and or cohorts of students in schools.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Schools

Teachers need to know about the kind of learning that is most valuable to their students for today and in the future. The most important learning outcome must surely be that students want to continue to learn. To do this students need the skills to be self-regulated learners and have attitudes that will make them open to new learning.

In the 1960s we moved from the belief that the role of the teacher was to help students remember facts and accumulate hierarchical skills. Learning theories now require the active engagement of students. Teachers need to know how students make sense of their knowledge and learning. It is focusing their processing strategies to enable them to solve problems that has become important. Socio-cultural perspectives add that learning occurs in interaction between the individual and the social environment.

All these theories of learning have implications for the type of assessment that are or should be used. Assessment practices must match our changes in learning theory.

Will national standards help?

The Government claims that the national standards in literacy and numeracy will:

- make clear what quality of learning (knowledge, understanding and skills) is expected to be achieved
- achieve consistency of judgement and reporting
- provide helpful language for teachers to use when discussing current achievement levels, progress to date and what comes next with their students and their parents,
- help identify students whose rate of progress puts them at risk of being unable to reach satisfactory achievement levels.

What do effective standards look like?

Lester Flockton (2008) says standards get it right when:

- they include a well balanced and interrelated set of abilities and dispositions, including those that are not readily or appropriately measurable by tests (e.g. enjoyment and engagement in reading)
- they are relative to the individual student's learning and show the progress they are making
- multiple sources of evidence are used to judge and validate performance including teachers' day-to-day observations and judgments
- they cause no harm to students
- they are sensitive to cultural and lingual differences and are understood, shared and supported by teachers.

What do parents want?

Parents want to know how their child is progressing. Some parents want to know how their child compares with others. A grade or mark is not enough. Parents need to know their child's strengths and weaknesses, what makes a difference and what contributions the home can make. Schools provide useful data but the data needs to be explained in ways that enable lay people to understand it and its implications.

What can we learn from overseas?

In the USA there are content standards in reading, mathematics and science i.e. what knowledge and skills students should acquire in the classroom. Standards are generally broad statements but they do not exist on their own. They need other measures such as benchmarks, grade level expectations, reporting curriculum, teacher professional development and tests. A whole industry pops up.

It is not the standards that are so troublesome but how the assessment or testing and reporting of student achievement and progress to parents is carried out. In particular, reporting of school-level data to the community and the comparison of "between schools" data is an area full of challenge.

There are lessons from England, the USA and NSW about the testing regimes. Research tells us that Standardised National Testing regimes to report on national standards can impact negatively on teaching and students.

In New Zealand over the last 20 years we have been in a competitive global economic world. Those 20% of students said to be failing is a cost to the country which could no longer be sustained. In 1995, the National-led government announced that by 2005, every child turning nine will be able to read, write and do maths for success. The Literacy Taskforce was set up to advise how to reach this goal.

Four years ago the Labour Government asked the Ministry to set goals in literacy and numeracy. Then in 2007 the National Party announced its policy to introduce National Standards.

QUESTION

How can systems be provided for schools so that any testing and reporting regimes put in place are robust and used for educationally sound purposes?

In considering this question you may wish to discuss:

- **What are the learning theories and assessment practices in your schools? What use do you and your school make of the data that is collected?**
- **How well do your parents understand your learning and assessment practices? What do you report to parents and how does it help engage your parents in their child's learning?**
- **Should the national standard be set at a minimum level that all students would need to reach each year or should it describe a range of performance? What would be the consequences?**
- **What may be the positive and negative impact of national standards on the intention of the New Zealand Curriculum and your school's curriculum?**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minister of Education's comments at the Numeracy hui for Facilitators, 17 Feb 2009

In her speech, the Minister reiterated the purpose and intention of the legislation and also said:

- National Standards will set clear expectations around what students should be able to achieve in literacy and numeracy, and by when. These will be reported to parents in plain language.
- We are not starting with a blank page. Many schools throughout New Zealand, because of their involvement in the numeracy project, can claim that most of their students are achieving at or above expectation. (She acknowledged that the numeracy work already sets out national expectations i.e. the level of achievement required at the end of each year and the learning pathways and progressions that students follow).
- The Government did not want to see "teaching to one narrow test". There will not be one national exam that all students sit on the same day at the same time.
- One size does not fit all. There is not going to be one test, one tool, one teaching programme, or one professional development programme. A teacher is able to choose the right approach at the right time for individual students.
- Parents want to know how well their children are doing and what they can expect when extra help is needed. They will be able to clearly see how their children sit against the National Standards.
- Schools will be able to use the information about assessments to effectively identify performance.
- Teachers and schools will be able to consistently deliver high student achievement ... "We all want to see every single student achieving at or above the expected level, and we know this is possible".

The Ministry presentation at the Numeracy hui for Facilitators, 17 Feb 2009

At the numeracy hui the Ministry official said the National Standards will:

- be compulsory
- happen at years 1-8
- cover all New Zealand state and integrated schools and all students in English medium and Māori medium
- not be assessed using a single test on the same day
- be reported regularly, upfront, and in plain language
- involve a refocus of the Ministry and Education Review Office
- provide extra support.

Ministry interpretation of Government Policy

The National Standards

- must be part of the big picture
- must not compete with the New Zealand Curriculum and/or Te Marautanga o Aotearoa
- will be based on teaching learning theory and research
- will send a message about what is valued
- need to reinforce status of existing pedagogy and align assessment tools
- must be connected to teaching and emphasise relational understanding in assessment
- will keep the focus on conceptual understanding
- will need to use multiple sources of data to contribute to a judgement bank on a common scale
- acknowledge appropriately the growth of individual students
 - have they reached the standard this year?
 - how much have they improved this year?
- provide a challenge for all students rather than a minimal compliance
- provide simple reporting to parents
- continue the comprehensive professional support for teachers
- comprise both a statement of outcomes and ways in which they will be measured
- link primary into NCEA and adult numeracy.

Timeline for the development of National Standards

2009	March	Draft National Standards written
	April	Process for publishing of Draft National Standards
	May	Consultation and feedback
	July	Feedback analysed and Draft National Standards revised
	September	National Standards published
2010		National Standards implemented in all schools.

Six to eight weeks for consultation
Timeline for Māori Medium yet to be decided