

# Principals' Discussion Sheet One

## NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT A DISCUSSION PAPER FOR NZEI PRINCIPALS

This paper has been designed to help you as the professional leader of your school to frame your conversations with professional colleagues, boards, staff and other communities of interest around the implications and impact of National Standards and how they will fit with good practice pedagogy and the principles underpinning the revised curriculum. It complements NZEI's paper on National Standards for Student Achievement which was part of the 'Teachers Matter' information pack sent to schools to engage teachers in discussion.

### Introduction

1. The Government has passed legislation empowering the Minister of Education to set National Standards in literacy and numeracy. Reporting on student achievement against the National Standards will be a requirement from 2010.
2. What the National Standards look like and how they will work in practice is the subject of a consultation process scheduled from 25th May – 3rd July. The consultation process includes not only educators, but has a parallel process for trustees, parents and whanau.
3. As the professional leader of learning you will need to focus on the impact of National Standards on student learning, teaching practice, and parent engagement within your school.
4. This discussion paper is based on information that has been made available to date about the National Standards including.
  - a) The Minister of Education's media releases.
  - b) The Ministry's '*Directions for Assessment in New Zealand – developing students' assessment capabilities*' designed to guide new strategies, policies and plans for assessment.
  - c) The New Zealand Assessment Academy. A group of leading New Zealand researchers who argue that National Standards are a major break from current practice in New Zealand and need to be implemented with care and consideration to both intended and unintended consequences.

Lester Flockton (2008), states that 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 eg 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

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# National Standards

## Focus Question One

How do the National Standards as drafted measure up against the criteria outlined by Lester Flockton?

Note: It is acknowledged that this question can only be addressed after the National Standards have been promulgated.

## Student Learning and Assessment

5. Good practice tells us assessment information is used to inform teaching and that assessment is, **for learning** (improving teaching), **of learning** (data gathering), **as learning** (student self-assessment and goal setting). Currently, many schools utilise a range of assessment tools and processes including teacher professional judgment in their teaching and learning programmes. All teachers and school leaders need access to models of good assessment practice to enable them to identify implications for their own and staff professional learning that will enable them to consolidate assessment for learning as part of the pedagogy in their schools.
6. Feedback to students is recognised as one of the most powerful elements of teaching and learning. Feedback reflects the status of a student's current learning, with feed-forward identifying what the student's next learning steps are.
7. Teacher professional judgment is an essential component in determining how well students are meeting the National Standards. That judgment should be the 'best fit' for each student based on a range of assessment tools and processes that teachers have used.
8. A further critical part of the process of learning and of assessment is enabling students to self-assess and evaluate. This is articulated as the central premise of 'Directions for Learning', that all young people should be educated in ways that develop their capacity to assess their own learning.

## Focus Question Two

Will the National Standards encourage broad use of a range of assessment tools as enhancements to teaching and learning practices?

## New Zealand Curriculum

9. National Standards establish the level of performance that students, teachers and schools are expected to meet. Narrowly defined National Standards would be unable to cover the full richness of a school's whole curriculum and serve to assess only discrete parts. The government has indicated that National Standards will initially be applied to the areas of literacy and numeracy.
10. This gives rise to tension between government requirements around National Standards in literacy and numeracy, and a school's capacity to provide a full and rich curriculum.
11. Each school curriculum will need to incorporate the National Standards. It will also need to take into account the learning needs and interests of students and the context of the school community.
12. In defining and planning your school curriculum, you will need to consider how the National Standards will work in your unique context and what the 'fit' with your school curriculum plan will be.

## Focus Question Three

Will the National Standards support your school curriculum and enable a depth of teaching, learning and assessment not only in reading, writing and maths but across the broader curriculum?

# National Standards

## Reporting and Accountability

13. The new legislation also requires that parents are provided with accurate and easily understood information on their child's learning. The debate about who is given what information at a class, school and a national level is one that the sector must grapple with. Accountability systems should promote an evaluative culture that supports ongoing learning at all levels of the system.
14. If National Standards are descriptive of what students should be able to do or achieve at a particular point in their schooling, reporting requirements will potentially help to identify students who are being left behind. If this increases the school's ability to access support for their learning at an earlier stage, we need to consider what information will be shared and with whom, to enable decision-making about resource allocation.
15. The questions we need to consider relate to the appropriate level of reporting at each level of the system to maintain the integrity of the process. How much data should remain at school level for use with individual students and their parents, school management and for community accountability via the Board of Trustees. What data should reasonably be provided to the 'centre' (ie a government agency such as the MoE or the ERO) and how can this be safeguarded from use not related to the purpose for which it was collected.
16. The potential for the creation and publication of league tables through accessing assessment data from the public domain will be increased if all school data is collected nationally. This is a very real concern. Internationally, league tables have resulted in teachers 'teaching to the test' with schooling becoming narrower and less engaging, in particular for hard to move students.
17. In any review of the NAGs and NEGs the systems goal must be about ensuring that reporting is aligned and clear and does not undermine the school's ability to provide a broad and responsive curriculum. Above all, it is critical to protect the integrity of the assessment data collected at school level so that it does not become politicised and 'cause harm' to individual students, teachers or schools.

## Focus Question Four

Will changes to the NEGs and NAGs around reporting ensure that teachers, schools and parents have a clear understanding of their respective responsibilities to interpret and use assessment data to support and improve student learning?

## Focus Question Five

What steps need to be taken to protect the data from misuse via the production of league tables?

## Finally

18. Internationally, research evidence is clear that good teaching and assessment rather than directive, narrowly focused National Standards are responsible for improving student achievement. The test for us is whether the National Standards enable or hinder both good teaching and the development of a curriculum that is responsive to student learning needs.
19. Principals as professional leaders in their schools will be at the forefront in influencing the debate on National Standards and how they can be designed to assist in improving student learning.