

## **Realising Maori Student Outcomes, One Leader at a Time.**

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Māori student achievement has been the catch-cry of this Government throughout its two terms in power.

National Standards has been promulgated and promoted as being this Government's answer to Māori student underachievement. In fact we are burdened with a host of remedies that will supposedly address the achievement needs of these priority learners, many of them ill-thought out and the others we know just won't work.

Compliance based initiatives just don't work.

What does work is when principals see a need to change and lead that change from the top. We call that 'leading by example' because we all know, that nothing works better in our schools than initiatives driven by us.

On that basis, Māori students need our help.

New Zealand has the unfortunate distinction of having the second highest rate of educational inequality in the OECD. For this reason, the chronic underachievement of Māori students in the New Zealand education system is an issue that should concern all teachers, all principals and all of New Zealand.

While efforts are being made to engage Māori students in learning, and to improve Māori students' performance on curriculum assessments, a more fundamental issue needs to be addressed, and that is whether or not the curriculum we deliver is relevant to, and appropriate for, Māori learners.

So significant is this issue that the Ministry believes its approach requires schools to engage with whanau in ways that are culturally appropriate by adopting the culture of the learner and reflecting it back to the school. Those involved in recent ERO reviews will recognise this focus.

Research suggests that the curriculum offered in many mainstream schools fails to meet the needs or interests of Māori learners.

Despite the New Zealand education system having as its most fundamental goal:

**'To prepare students to contribute positively to society'**, mainstream education often fails to prepare Māori students to contribute positively to any society, let alone a Māori society.

Many Māori students have attended a school that places little to no value on any aspects of Māori society which creates an underclass of Māori who are ill equipped to participate in or contribute positively to Māori society.

As well as failing to develop the cultural competence of Māori students, many mainstream schools fail to recognise and affirm the cultural competence that Māori students bring with them to their school environment.

Those schools that do recognise and affirm Māori student cultural competence started with simple things like offering Māori curricula, providing Māori immersion classes and activities like manu korero, waka ama and kapa haka. These schools found that these activities promoted Māori students and improved Māori student self-esteem, well-being and academic outcomes.

Taken together, these results support the assertion of Ka Hikitia (the Māori education strategy) that 'Language, identity and culture count' and challenges schools to do more to promote Māori cultural competence. These results also suggest that the educational needs of Māori should be better reflected in mainstream curricula to prepare them for the future they will face as Māori. Our education system's focus on literacy and numeracy fails to recognise and appreciate that tikanga and te reo might be the 'literacy and numeracy' of the Māori world

Much of what is driving this Government is based on the achievement or lack thereof of Māori students in all our schools.

The Government's answer is to legislate; to force us to do what they think we should do. There isn't much consultation, just do as we say legislation.

As President Phil Harding has touched on, NZPF has over recent months decided to do more than just talk about Māori student under-achievement. 91% of Māori students are in our mainstream school settings, so where better to start?

We've decided to arrest this Māori student under-achievement issue and to realise Māori student outcomes, one leader at a time and we've started at the NZPF Exec level first.

Māori education or Maturanga Māori is now prevalent in all we do as an exec. At every exec meeting we learn more to enable us to better understand our Māori learners.

We've spoken to the Minister of Education about our focus on improving outcomes for Māori learners and she has committed the Ministry to work alongside us to this end.

Typical of any initiative the Ministry buys into, they have tried to take over our plans and play a leadership role but we have been adamant in reminding them that it is an NZPF initiative and one that we will direct and lead, with or without their help.

We want to set up clusters of schools where each cluster can identify their own needs in relation to success for Māori as Māori.

What will that look like? That's up to each school, each cluster and each iwi to determine.

The Ministry of Education has set up over 48 iwi education partnerships throughout the country. This is where iwi are encouraged to take more responsibility for the educational outcomes of their learners. Obviously that will create opportunities for iwi and schools to work more closely to improve outcomes for Māori learners.

It will provide opportunities for a school's curriculum to be more localised better reflecting the local iwi, local legends and local heroes.

What better way to lift the success of Māori learners than by building on the cultural strengths and beliefs of its own.

President Phil Harding will be contacting all principals over the next few months inviting you to join a cluster committed to improving outcomes for Vstudents, one leader at a time.

NZPF invites your association presidents to lead this work in your area. Who better to lead it than you, the association presidents in your region.

NZPF hopes to identify and utilise experts who will work within these clusters to challenge your thinking and help you create a school environment that promotes and celebrates Māori success.

Māori under-achievement will continue unabated if we, New Zealand principals don't take up this challenge.

I'm a firm believer that we, Māori, cannot correct this on our own.

Māori students and Māori families are looking to us for help because without our help realising Māori success will remain a distant dream.

Let's do what New Zealand principals do best, let's lead by example.

Na reira, oku hoa nga tumuaki o Aotearoa, Nga mihi ki a koutou katoa