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**New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) Submission on  
Healthy Drinks in Schools  
Closing Date 2 June  
To: [legislation.consultation@education.govt.nz](mailto:legislation.consultation@education.govt.nz)**

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The New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) is the largest professional organisation for lead educators representing the interests of over 2,000 Principals of Primary, Intermediate, Area and Secondary Schools. Principals are from public, integrated and independent schools and are spread throughout New Zealand. NZPF aims to be the most influential advocate for school principals to enable high quality, well supported leadership for school learners in New Zealand.

**Introduction**

NZPF welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the *Healthy Drinks in Schools* proposal. We have sought the views of principals through a survey and have examined the Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report in constructing this commentary. We note that the Ministry of Health's preference is for all schools (primary and secondary) to adopt 'water only' policies, whilst the Ministry of Education recommends primary schools only be targeted by the policy. NZPF members favour a 'water only' policy for all schools with sixty percent of survey respondents already implementing a 'water only' policy.

**General Comments**

School Principals have long argued that young people who have a healthy diet and consume healthy drinks, are better equipped to engage in learning. We support the 'healthy lunches in schools' programme for low decile schools and encourage the expansion of the programme into more schools. We note that the school lunches include healthy drinks. It is well known that sugary drinks are the major source of dental decay in young children and we support eliminating these drinks from children's diets. This view is consistent with research showing "...that children in primary schools experience high rates of decayed, missing or filled teeth." Such problems become lifelong problems for these students. Dental decay, according to the *'Environmental Health Indicators'* is the most common disease reported among children in New Zealand.

It is argued that it is easier for primary schools to implement a 'water only' policy because few primary and intermediate schools have canteens where children can buy sugary drinks. Secondary schools, however, are more likely to provide canteens which sell sugary drinks. In our view that argument does not justify the selling of sugary drinks from secondary school canteens. All school age youngsters need protection from the effects of ingesting drinks with high sugar content, particularly as they lead not only to tooth decay but also obesity and diabetes. Secondary-aged students, regularly drinking sugary drinks, are not exempted from tooth decay and obesity related lifelong health issues.

The argument that secondary schools may be engaged in contracts to provide sugary drinks is not a justification for continuing this practice. Schools should not be enabling poor eating and drinking habits for any young people, including secondary school students.

Our Pacific Island and Māori students are disproportionately affected by obesity and poor dental health. Continuing to make sugary drinks available in school to these students is, in our view, irresponsible, and counter to the goal to improve health and wellbeing for all students.

## **Recommendations**

NZPF emphasises the urgency of eliminating sugary drinks from all schools, including secondary schools.

Secondary schools should be instructed to terminate all canteen contracts for the supply of sugary drinks immediately.

NZPF supports Option 2 to replace the existing NAG 5b with a duty in Regulations and place an additional duty on all schools (primary and secondary) to only provide healthy drinks

Ngā manaakitanga

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