

11 November 2016

**New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) Submission on the  
EDUCATION ACT UPDATE**

**To: the Education & Science Select Committee**

**Personal Details:**

Agency: New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF)  
Designation: National Executive  
Address: National Office, PO Box 25380, Wellington 6146

The New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) is the largest professional organisation for lead educators representing the interests of 2,259 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.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Education Act Update Bill and request that we make an **oral submission**.

**Introduction**

NZPF expresses unease with respect to the proposals outlined in the Education Act Update and in particular finds the inclusion of changes hitherto not signalled, such as the Online Learning Schools (COOLs) proposal disturbing. It is our expectation that such far reaching proposals should first be subjected to a full consultation process before being presented in a proposal to alter the Education Act.

That said, we welcome the opportunity to contemplate the purpose of education in Aotearoa New Zealand and how we can better frame education legislation to reflect the values we believe in including equity of learning outcomes, fairness and providing the highest quality public education system through self-managed schools governed by the local community. Our vision is to have our schools staffed by well qualified registered teachers and suitably supported leadership.

This submission will comment on those aspects of the Bill relating to the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (SNELP), establishing Communities of Online Learning Schools (COOLs), abolition of school charters, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of Boards of Trustees and forcing Boards of Trustees to merge, permitting Communities of Learning (CoLs) to include tertiary and ECE members and enrolment schemes.

PO Box 25380  
Wellington 6146

Level 8 The Bayleys Building  
36 Brandon Street

THE MOST RESPECTED AND INFLUENTIAL ADVOCATE FOR NEW ZEALAND'S SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

ph:+64 4 471 2338  
fax:+64 4 471 2339

email: [office@nzpf.ac.nz](mailto:office@nzpf.ac.nz)  
web: [www.nzpf.ac.nz](http://www.nzpf.ac.nz)

## 1. Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (SNELP)

- This section of the Education Act Update abolishes the existing National Education Goals (NEGs) and the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) and replaces them with a set of objectives and medium-term priorities
- SNELP does not include or encompass a vision for New Zealand's education system for compulsory schooling, which the sector has repeatedly sought
- A vision would provide an over-arching direction for New Zealand's public education system and give some confidence that any objectives or priorities for education would follow logically from and be consistent with the vision
- In our view a vision for education would be based on values that New Zealand communities aspire to including the notion of fairness, justice, life-long learning and equitable outcomes for all
- Further, the vision would describe the purpose for education and should SNELP be adopted, the vision would inform any statement of national education learning priorities
- NZPF believes any statement for education and learning priorities would necessarily reflect New Zealand's world class curriculum and would include a broad range of success indicators
- There is no certainty for the sector that SNELP would not be withdrawn or replaced by the Minister by means of giving notice in the *Gazette* leaving schools no assurance for long term planning. The Update states that minor changes can be made without consultation with the sector and without being presented to the House of Representatives. The Minister would determine whether a change was minor or not
- It is the NZPF view that should SNELP proceed, 'minor change' should be clearly defined in the Act and any changes should be presented to the House of Representatives
- In the event that SNELP was adopted, NZPF, as the largest professional organisation for principals, would want to be consulted and actively participate in the construction of the statement of national education learning priorities

## 2. Establishing Community of On-line Learning Schools (COOLS)

- The OECD outlines 'Seven principles of learning', which our profession supports. The second of these states:

*'Neuroscience confirms that we learn from social interaction – the organisation of learning should be highly social.*

*Cooperative group work appropriately organised and structured has demonstrated very clear benefits for achievement as well as for behavioural and affective outcomes. Cooperative methods work for all types of students because done well they push learners of all abilities.'*

- Our own NZ Curriculum also states in the key competencies section that we should have a focus on relating to others, participating and contributing
- In our view maintaining ongoing social interaction, conversations and cooperative group work through on-line learning when students are in isolation from each other, is not achievable. Setting up a schooling option to isolate students is counterproductive to

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successful learning

- The Update gives no clear reason for introducing this schooling option nor does it clarify any particular target group of students
- Research has repeatedly shown that qualified teachers are the single biggest influence on students' learning. Nowhere in the Update section on COOLS is there credit given for this important factor, nor is it suggested that qualified leaders and teachers would be leading this learning, when New Zealand's teachers are amongst the best in the world
- For the best learning to occur, students need a teacher present who responds to their changing curriculum needs and level of learning if they are to be appropriately challenged and make progress. Because each student is unique, it is not possible for any given online learning option to provide the most effective learning for all students, unless a qualified teacher is present to monitor, assess, give frequent feedback and guide learning
- We note that all schools are engaged in digital learning and blended environments operate now to take full advantage of technology and to ensure all students become digitally literate citizens
- The only benefit we see for COOLS comes from private providers who would be enabled to enter the education market in New Zealand and turn a profit for their business.
- We are disappointed that this initiative has appeared in the Update, unannounced and with no opportunity for consultation

### 3. Abolition of School Charters

- NZPF rejects the notion of abolishing charters.
- Charters define the context of each individual school and through consultation with the local community capture the aspirations and needs of each of those communities. Through this process, school targets can be set that are relevant and consistent with those aspirations and better match the learning needs of the students
- Abolition of charters would signal a major departure from the fundamental intent of *Tomorrow's Schools* which is to give control of schools to local communities. The charter with its statement of vision, values, strategic plan and annual plan gives clarity to each school's direction and intent and is co-constructed by the school and community
- To replace charters with a strategic plan only is to shun the rich diversity of our school communities and to court sameness and central control
- To allow a Community of Learning (CoL) to have one charter across the whole CoL would discriminate against poorer schools and not take account of diversity and the different contexts for different schools
- NZPF supports the intention of the *Tomorrow's Schools* policy for self-managing, locally governed, locally focussed schools and charters are a cornerstone to this thinking

### 4. Clarifying the Roles and Responsibilities of Boards of Trustees and Forcing Boards of Trustees to Merge

- NZPF supports greater clarity around the roles and responsibilities of Boards of Trustees, particularly distinguishing between the roles of the Board and principals
- We welcome changes to the Update which would set out all the Board of Trustees requirements in one place
- We would suggest an addition to the responsibilities of Boards, the requirement to ensure principals and teachers have access to quality professional learning and

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development programmes

- NZPF accepts that from time to time it is both helpful and functional to have more than one school governed by a single Board of Trustees. Current legislation allows for this to happen by request of the schools and in consultation with the community. There are existing examples where this arrangement works well
- Any measure, current or proposed, that enables more than one school to be governed by a single Board of Trustees **therefore** should be the exception not the rule
- NZPF is opposed to the Minister having the singular right to force Boards of Trustees to merge, without community support and without such a request from the schools concerned
- NZPF is also opposed to the Minister having the right to combine Boards of Trustees when a school is established
- There is nothing in the Update that would prevent any number of Boards combining including Communities of Learning (CoLs) having a single Board of Trustees
- There is nothing in the Update to prevent the Minister from forcing the Boards of Trustees of a CoL from combining
- Evidence from overseas suggests that it is entirely possible to have whole district failures where schools are all under a single jurisdiction
- There is an implication in the Update suggesting an intention to deliberately reduce the number of Boards of Trustees and thereby dismantle the existing structure of self-governing schools, locally controlled

## 5. Permitting Communities of Learning (CoLs) to include ECE and Tertiary Members

- NZPF remains sceptical of the construct of CoLs especially the leadership roles and the achievement challenges
- Research undertaken by NZPF showed that 70% of principals are uncomfortable to some degree about the concept of CoLs. Twenty-eight percent reported that the model was too inflexible and they did not support the lead principal being paid for the role. Twenty-two percent believed there was a hidden agenda and they did not have trust in the model. A further twenty percent were not convinced there would be any benefits to the achievement of their students
- There are high levels of support for collaboration amongst principals yet they do not believe the hierarchical model of the CoL is the correct model for successful collaboration
- Principals feel coerced into joining CoLs
- Achievement challenges accepted for existing CoLs have tended to be closely related to National Standards/NCEA and do not reflect the broad range of educational/social/behavioural/health challenges facing schools
- Extending CoLs to include ECE and Tertiary members risks subjugating developmentally appropriate education through the pressure each stage of education brings
- Some principals who have joined CoLs are now finding the time commitment more than they expected and they are not advancing the learning progress of the children in their own schools
- There is concern that CoLs are less about education of students and supporting principals and teachers and more about setting up a system for administering future funding
- Given the reservations principals have about CoLs and that they are far from established practice, NZPF believes it is premature to consider the inclusion of ECE and Tertiary providers

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## 6. Enrolment Schemes

- History shows that there can be huge gaps between policy intent and the reality on the ground
- Where policies are enacted at a distance from those responsible for their implementation they are more likely to result in perverse outcomes
- Giving the Ministry the power to force an enrolment scheme on a school is more likely to result in resistance and conflict
- Issues around enrolment schemes are complex and cannot be solved in simplistic ways
- On the one hand this Update enables yet another choice of school (COOLS) to operate in the system to give parents more choice, yet allows the Ministry to force enrolment schemes which give parents no choice. There is a contradiction here
- NZPF favours a consultative process for establishing enrolment schemes which would involve the Principal, the Board of Trustees and the Ministry

Yours sincerely



Iain Taylor  
**National President**  
[iaint@nzpf.ac.nz](mailto:iaint@nzpf.ac.nz)

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