Updating the Education Act 1989

Executive summary of submissions received

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This report summarises the submissions received on the public discussion document "Have your say about Updating the Education Act 1989". 1854 submissions were received from a wide range of education sector and other groups and individuals, providing relevant and useful information to inform the Update of the Act.

Making sure everyone knows the goals for education

The main theme emerging from the submissions was that the goals of education should go beyond narrow measures of academic achievement and should result in well-rounded individuals. The seven most frequently mentioned goals for education were:

» Student success and achieving individual potential

» Preparation for work and future life

» Connection to others and good citizenship

» Resilience, determination, confidence, creativity and critical thinking

» Being inclusive of all students

» Valuing cultural knowledge and identity, recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi and te reo Māori

» Social skills and the ability to form good relationships.

There was an expectation that the goals would be decided only after further consultation.

The majority of people who responded to the question on a National Priorities Statement made positive suggestions as to how this should be developed. This suggests openness to the establishment of a process in the Act.

Supporting boards to focus on what's important

In responding to the question on potential roles and responsibilities for boards of trustees (boards), those cited most frequently were:

» governance (as opposed to management)

» ensuring learners reach a high educational standard

» providing a safe environment for staff and students

» consulting with the community over guiding policies and practices

» community voice

» operating in a financially responsible way.

Respondents to the question on planning and reporting agreed that the system needs to be simplified. There was some support for a standardised template. There was strong support for a strategic planning cycle of more than one year, with three years being most frequently suggested.

Submitters who believed that schools did not need to collaborate on planning and reporting saw each school or kura as unique. Others favoured the current system of optional collaboration but wanted more resourcing and advisors to enable them to do it better. Early childhood services focused on how they should be included in the planning and reporting of their Communities of Learning.

Many believed that the way schools report to parents, families, whānau and communities should be for schools and their communities to determine. There was a preference for face-to-face reporting, although more teachers preferred written reporting. Submitters suggested reporting on students should be specific to the individual learner and should focus on progress rather than absolute measures.

In responding to the question around indicators and measures for school and student achievement, submitters believed that indicators should be determined by the local community or school management. The most frequently mentioned indicators were student progress, student well-being, parent, community and learner feedback and success across the New Zealand Curriculum.

With regard to freedoms for schools or kura that are doing well, some submitters were concerned that if extra freedoms were available, it would foster unproductive competition. Instead, schools that were not doing well should be supported to do better. Increased flexibility over resourcing and curriculum and less onerous reporting requirements were the main freedoms other submitters suggested.

Enabling collaboration, flexibility and innovation

Many submitters were happy with the way boards currently work together, especially with the flexibility to choose how and when they collaborate. Some submitters identified the need for more information sharing between boards, especially for students at transition points. There was support for improving board expertise through joint professional development and shared functions such as secretarial, legal and financial services. Shared governance of schools as a way to maximise limited resources and skills was also raised.

There was significant support for some form of cohort entry. Supporters believed that it would simplify administration and enable smoother transitions from early childhood. Submitters did raise concerns around this for special needs learners and flow on effects for early childhood education. Many sector organisations in particular opposed cohort entry because the current system allows transitions to be tailored to each child. Early childhood responses were mixed, but included some anxiety about the flow-on effects for their sector.

Making attendance compulsory once a five year old enrolled at school in order to ensure the best outcomes for student progress was supported. However, submitters did raise the parents' right to decide when their child is ready to attend school.

Making every school and kura a great one

Submitters suggested non-legislative supports, including:

» Better and earlier support for schools, especially from the Ministry of Education

» More support for principals and better induction processes: for example, mentoring for all principals

» More professional learning and development for all staff

» Addressing wider social inequities

» Intervention processes better tailored to different school types: for example, the procedures being developed with Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa.

Making the best use of local education provision

Submissions about area strategies focused on who should be the decision-maker and what the consultation could look like. Suggested decision-makers ranged from: the boards or community involved; clusters of schools; the Minister or the Ministry; or an independent body. The main elements of the consultation process were identified as being:

» Fairness and transparency

» Based on evidence

» Using written and face-to face methods

» Culturally responsive, sensitive and guided by tikanga.

A significant number of submitters agreed that it would be helpful to have guiding principles for establishment, closures and mergers in the Education Act, and that these should be based on student needs, particularly those of students with special education needs. Other factors were the

impact on other schools and early childhood services and the wider community. There was widespread agreement among submitters that the process should be transparent.

More submitters expressed opposition to extending the law on enrolment schemes than expressed support. This was because they thought the law on enrolment schemes was sufficient and wanted to retain control over the way students were enrolled. However, it was not always clear whether submitters were expressing opposition to the specific proposals or opposition to enrolment schemes in general. Those who supported proposed changes thought schools had excessive power, and that changes could improve collaboration between schools, aid with inclusive practices, and make enrolment schemes more manageable.

Lifting aspiration and raising educational achievement **for every New Zealander**

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TE TĀHUHU O TE MĀTAURANGA