

NATIONAL STANDARDS - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At present I am receiving information relating to the new National Standards that relate to achievement levels expected for all students in Years 1 to 8.

There is a lot of attention about this in the media also, so the purpose of this communication is to relay to you my level of understanding in a way in which hopefully you are able to understand also.

1. Why have National Standards been put in place? The Minister of Education refers to an ERO report that indicates that 1 in 5 children are leaving school without the skills and qualifications they need to succeed.

It is the Government's belief therefore,

- that National Standards will enable an improvement in student achievement by providing sound information about how students are progressing
- early identification of students who are falling behind will allow schools, teachers and parents to make informed decisions about how to improve students achievement and provide additional support where appropriate

2. The information relating to the implementation of the standards arrived at school at the beginning of December 2009. It is expected that the standards be implemented February 2010.

THE CONCERN ABOUT NATIONAL STANDARDS

You may be aware that at present there is a fair amount of protest occurring due to widespread concern about the standards themselves and there not being any data to support the fact that they will raise student achievement.

In order to overcome this concern, parents, educational experts, principals and teachers are asking that instead of implementing the standards immediately, that a trial take place to test and evaluate the standards plus identify what appropriate monitoring mechanisms and support mechanisms are required.

If you compare the fact that the new curriculum was implemented over a two year period with significant amounts of communication plus training and development for teachers and schools, this request does not appear unreasonable to me. A trial is occurring for Maori schools, so I also feel if it is good enough to trial the standards in Maori schools, the same should apply for all schools.

At the moment, the stance the government is taking is that the standards are compulsory and that they are to be implemented without a trial. If this continues to be the case the concern is that:

- The standards are untested
- As not all children come to school equal, there is potential to label children as failing at age 5, damaging their motivation to learn if this is not handled sensibly
- National Standards in their present form will encourage schools to march children through the fixed annual levels rather than let them develop at their own pace
- The standardised testing is unnecessary. Schools already use a wide variety of assessment tools to identify children's progress and already know which children are struggling
- Overseas, national standards regimes have led to the manipulation of data, inaccurate classification of students and inconsistent moderation of standards across schools
- Reduced flexibility in the curriculum
- A repeat of the debacle of rushed NCEA implementation
- The possible introduction of league tables and the negative effects that it brings on staff morale and unfair perceptions of schools by communities and individuals

As a parent, I'd add to the above that given we have just finished working through a process over two years to put in place curriculum goals appropriate to our community and what we would like to see occur in our school, that instead of children having a broad range of experiences to achieve the goals we have just finished setting, that teaching will focus more on "teaching to the test" and a lesser focus on experiences that the children learn from.

I also have concerns about how the new national standards will impact on the curriculum goals we have set for our school. Is it possible that the consultation process we have been through over the last two years was a waste of time ?

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF SCHOOL BOARDS?

During 2010, we are expected to focus on:

- Providing a plain language written report to parents at least twice a year. At one of these the report has to cover:
 - the students' current learning goals
 - the students' progress and achievement in relation to national standards
 - what the school will do to support the students learning
 - what parents can do to support their child's learning
- setting school charter targets for 2011 in reading, writing and maths in relation to national standards
- using analysed progress and achievement data to prioritise the allocation of resources for 2011

Given that:

- the staff focus area for professional development this year is "Assessment and Reporting";
- effective assessment tools are being utilised within our school;
- we are getting reporting that relates to student progress and are satisfied that steps are being taken to address the needs of those identified as being at risk;
- the Board has agreed on a number ways to enable these children to have the individual attention and programmes that they need. Included in these are funding an extra teacher to bring class numbers down, funding teacher aides during Reading times, and purchasing resources to assist with teaching and learning programmes. The school also cross-groups children in both Maths and English to cater for individual needs;
- testing does not raise achievement! Teaching and learning programmes that recognise where a child is at in their learning, then help the child to move to the next learning step are what raises achievement. We recognise the importance of working together in a three-way partnership as our motto 'Together we learn and grow' and our interviews to set those goals and learning steps clearly show;
- we already have plain language written reporting twice a year in place that was modified after consultation and approved by parents;

we are happy with what is currently happening at Tapanui School.

However we're joining parents, education experts, principals, and teachers around the country in urging the Government to put children's learning first and make a sensible decision to trial and evaluate its National Standards.

At Wednesday evening's Board Meeting it was moved unanimously that we request the Government to trial the National Standards and all Board members signed a petition which will be presented to the House of Representatives at the end of May.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS CONCERNED PARENTS

This petition is at the school office and we would ask that you add your signature to it next time you visit school. If you would like to discuss this further please contact me.

Regards

Marianne Parks