

# YEA Submission on changes to school board objectives and removing the NELP from legislation

## ABOUT YEA

YEA (Youth Employability Aotearoa) is a systems change organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand advocating for our youth to be given the skills and support to become work-ready. We represent over 500 individuals, organisations, businesses, associations, and elected members who are committed to ensuring the future workforce is equipped with the skills needed to create strong communities and a robust economy.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

YEA applauds the Government's vision for an education system that inspires every child and engages them in their learning so they can achieve to the best of their ability and gain the skills and qualifications that will support them into further study and employment. However, the the proposed changes are more than likely to have the opposite effect to the one intended and we strongly urge the government to reconsider its approach.

While good literacy is the foundation for all learning, the pursuit of a narrow academic curriculum will stymie our youth and New Zealand industries. The fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) is drastically affecting nearly every economic sector and signifies a seismic shift for current and future employees. Currently, businesses predict that 44% of workers' core skills will be disrupted, because technology is moving faster than companies can design and scale up their training programmes.

For our future workforce to survive in this environment, studies, such as those conducted by The World Economic Forum, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Future of Work Institute, show it is imperative students are equipped with critical and creative thinking skills, problem solving skills, emotional intelligence, teamwork and communication skills.\*

Our submission reflects the views held by the 500+ members of our network. The education system must prepare students for the future of work where resilience, lifelong learning, and agility will be vital for our youth and industries to thrive in Aotearoa.

\*see, for example, *Challenging Social Inequality Through Career Guidance Insights from International Data and Practice*, OECD, 2024.

### Question 1

Do you agree with the proposal to make student achievement the primary objective, with the other objectives included as necessary to achieve the primary objective?

- No. The primary objective of schools should be to prepare students for real-world challenges by bridging theory and practice through the integration of academic content and hands-on experiences. The following NELPs should remain a priority: NELP 2 Barrier Free Access and NELP 4 Future of Learning and Work.

### Question 2

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. If our proposed primary objective was adopted, schools would be supported to meet their attendance targets. There is substantial evidence that the integration of academic content with hands-on experiences will significantly enhance student engagement.

- Active Learning Research: Studies show that active learning strategies, which include hands-on experiences, lead to higher engagement levels compared to traditional instruction and shows that students are more likely to engage and retain information.
- Project-Based Learning (PBL): Students working on real-world projects tend to develop a deeper understanding of the material and see its relevance to their lives. Research indicates that PBL increases both student motivation and engagement.
- Cognitive Engagement: Hands-on experiences promote critical thinking skills, encourages students to analyse, evaluate, and create. This cognitive engagement leads to greater interest in and commitment to learning.
- Improved Academic Performance: Several studies have found that students who participate in experiential learning perform better academically. The hands-on application of concepts is highly engaging and helps solidify understanding.
- Social and Emotional Benefits: Hands-on learning often involves collaboration, which can enhance social skills and emotional engagement, fostering a positive learning environment.
- Students who have clear certainty and clear career plans at 15 are less likely to think that school is a waste of time and so attendance will increase - low attendance is usually a reflection of the students not seeing school as having any value or connection to the real work of work.

2.

Descriptive PISA 2022 data confirms that students who say ‘school is a waste of time’, who worry that they will not have enough money to do what they would like after the completion of secondary education, and who say they often do not have enough money to buy food are all more likely to express career uncertainty.\*

### Question 3

Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a new objective for school boards to take all reasonable steps to ensure the attendance of the students enrolled in their school?

No. We propose a new objective. School boards should take all reasonable steps to ensure the engagement of the students enrolled in their school.

### Question 4

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. Focusing on engagement in schools is a key strategy for improving attendance, creating a cycle where higher engagement leads to better attendance, which in turn reinforces engagement. Engagement impacts attendance through the following ways:

- **Motivation to Attend:** When students feel engaged and interested in their learning, they are more motivated to attend school regularly. They look forward to classes and activities that resonate with their interests.
- **Sense of Belonging:** Engaged students often feel a stronger sense of belonging and connection to their school community. This emotional connection can encourage them to attend more consistently.
- **Positive Learning Environment:** An engaging classroom environment promotes positivity and enthusiasm, making students more likely to attend. They associate school with enjoyable experiences rather than just a requirement.
- **Supportive Relationships:** Engaged students often build supportive relationships with teachers, peers, and family members, fostering a network that encourages regular attendance.
- **Reduced Behavioral Issues:** Increased engagement can lead to fewer behavioral problems, creating a more conducive learning environment that encourages attendance.

3.

\**Teenage career uncertainty, Why it matters and how to reduce it?* OECD, 2024.

- **Relevance of Learning:** Real-world connections and hands-on experiences enhance student engagement and attendance. When students see the relevance of what they are learning, they are more inclined to show up.

### **Question 5**

Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a new objective for school boards to ensure that the school's principal and staff use good quality assessment and aromatawai information to monitor and evaluate students' progress and achievement?

YEA cannot comment on any particular methodological tools employed by schools for assessment and monitoring progress and achievement. The ultimate goal would be that students leave school with knowledge and experience of the world of work and a clear career plan, as embedded in the objectives in the NELPS.

### **Question 6**

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. The Government should heed the advice it receives from the submissions made by school principals and boards on this matter.

### **Question 7**

Do you agree with the proposal remove the objective that requires school boards to give effect to relevant student rights set out in the Education and Training Act 2020, the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993?

No. New Zealand ranks 35th out of 42 developed countries for child wellbeing outcomes and we have the 7th highest rate of child homicide in the OECD. The last thing the Government should propose is the removal of rights that protect our children. Having this right as a requirement for boards ensures that specific needs within schools are considered and protected.

### Question 8

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. Embedding student rights is vital for fostering a positive, equitable, and effective learning environment that supports the holistic development of all students. This right should hold a special place in the board objectives for the following reasons:

- **Empowerment:** Recognising student rights empowers learners to advocate for themselves and others, fostering a sense of agency and responsibility.
- **Safe Learning Environment:** Upholding student rights creates a supportive atmosphere where all students feel secure and valued.
- **Encourages Diversity and Inclusion:** Emphasising rights promotes inclusivity and respect for diversity, helping to create a school culture that celebrates differences and prevents discrimination.
- **Promotes Active Citizenship:** Understanding and exercising their rights prepares students to become active, informed citizens who engage in their communities and understand their responsibilities.
- **Enhances Academic Success:** Students who feel respected and supported are more likely to be engaged in their learning, which can lead to better academic outcomes.
- **Fosters Trust:** When students know their rights are upheld, it builds trust between them and school staff, encouraging open communication and collaboration.

### Question 9

Do you agree with the proposal to move the requirement for schools to achieve equitable outcomes for Māori students in a more visible place in the Tiriti/treaty clause in section 127?

Depends. If this is merely a symbolic gesture in an attempt at appeasement then no. If this move is backed by policy and resources that support ākonga Māori to achieve their potential, then yes.

### Question 10

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. To effectively achieve the Government's objective to see every child achieve to the best of their ability, then schools must not only provide Māori with the same opportunities and support, they must also actively work to dismantle the barriers that prevent Māori achievement outcomes in schools. Schools need to provide the following:

- Culturally Responsive Teaching: Incorporate Māori perspectives, histories, and languages into the curriculum to make learning relevant and meaningful for Māori students.
- Teacher Training: Provide professional development for educators on Māori culture, language, and educational needs to enhance understanding and effectiveness.
- Support for Language and Identity: Promote the use of te reo Māori and cultural practices in school settings, fostering pride in Māori identity.
- Strong Relationships: Build trusting relationships between teachers, students, and whānau (families). Engage with the community to understand their aspirations and values.
- Personalised Learning Plans: Develop individualized learning plans that recognize the unique strengths and challenges of Māori students, setting achievable goals.
- Involvement of Whānau: Actively involve families in the educational process, encouraging their participation in school activities and decision-making.
- Mentorship and Role Models: Establish mentorship programs that connect Māori students with positive role models from the Māori community who can inspire and guide them.
- Inclusive Environment: Create a school culture that celebrates diversity and fosters an inclusive environment where all students feel valued and respected.

### Question 11

Do you agree with the proposal to change the term 'local curriculum' to 'teaching and learning programmes'?

No. The Government's reasoning for the change is inadequate. The proposal states that the term 'local curriculum' *may* cause confusion. It presents the change to 'learning programmes' as a matter of semantics. However, this is a seismic shift in how schools currently create their learning programmes. 6.

### Question 12

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. The Government needs to create a proposal for a change that reflects the significance of a shift away from local curriculum and present to the public for feedback.

### Question 13

Do you agree with the proposal to remove the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities from the Act?

No. The current NELP promotes equity and excellence for all students and prepares them for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the future. Removing them will jeopardise the successful transition of students from school to future learning and work.

### Question 14

Do you have any views or comments to make on this proposal?

Yes. The NELP enable a more nuanced and considered way to address the diverse needs of learners and enable an education system to go beyond narrowly-defined high-stakes assessments that lead to mediocrity, failure, inequity, and NEETS.\* We will focus on the reasons for maintaining the objective of NELP 4 The Future of Learning and Work:

**Increased Engagement:** It bridges the gap between classroom knowledge and real-world applications, helping students understand how their education applies to future careers. Career conversations are associated with more positive engagement with school and the belief that working hard in education will help get a good job.\*\* Understanding the relevancy of what they are learning, drives engagement, which in turn drives attendance. Work-readiness learning in schools through programmes of learning, such as Gateway, Trade Academy, or the School Leavers' Toolkit classes, contextualises and provides meaning and purpose to studies. Student engagement rates increase when they can relate their studies to real-world applications. Greater engagement rates will contribute to the Government's attendance targets for schools.

\*/\*\* Career guidance, social inequality and social mobility, Insights from international data, OECD, 2024.

**Career Exploration:** It provides opportunities for students to explore different career paths, helping them make informed decisions about their futures. The TEC 2020 report, Transitions from Secondary Schools, showed that our young students are suffering from increased anxiety levels due to a lack of sufficient and/or appropriate careers support. Schools in New Zealand need to be better equipped to support career guidance for their students. Research consistently show the multifaceted fiscal and actual advantages of extensive career education and guidance programmes. This research also highlights the role effective programmes have in improving post-secondary transitions, fostering informed career decisions, as well as enhancing attendance, engagement, and academic achievement.

**Skill Development:** Through work-readiness programmes, students gain practical skills and competencies that are highly valued by employers, such as driver licence training, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. Work-based learning in particular fosters essential soft skills, such as critical and creative thinking which are crucial in any workplace and which studies are showing to be of greater importance with the advent of AI. Almost two-thirds of children in primary school will end up employed in roles that don't currently exist. With AI creating job displacement and threatening to outstrip workers' ability to adapt, schools need to be equipped to prepare their students for this rapidly changing environment.

**Local Community Involvement:** The future of learning and work programmes strengthen ties between schools and local businesses, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. Students can build professional connections, which can be beneficial for internships and job placements later on, and local businesses can generate a pipeline for their future workforce.

**Reducing Unemployment and Underemployment:** Our education system must cater to the 60-70% of students not on the pathway to tertiary studies to ensure they do not become NEETs. The intention of NELP 4 must be embedded in our education system to ensure that the Government can reach its targets of reducing Jobseeker numbers. Otherwise, the 50,000 jobseekers will be replaced by the next generation of NEETs.



## CONCLUSION

While YEA supports the Government's vision for an inspiring and engaging education system, we firmly believe that the proposed changes may hinder rather than help our students. We urge the government to reconsider its approach to educational reform. Focusing solely on student achievement will create a narrow academic environment that does not equip young people for the complexities of the future workforce.

It is imperative that every student in Aotearoa is educated appropriately to thrive in a fast and ever-changing world. By doing so, we will cultivate a resilient and adaptable workforce that meets the needs of our economy and society.

Yours sincerely



Director  
YEA  
Ph 021 056 0759  
emma@yea.org.nz