PPTA

NEW ZEALAND POST PRIMARY
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
TE WEHENGARUA

www.ppta.org.nz

SUBMISSION

to the

Education and Science Select Committee

on the

Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children

1. **About PPTA**
   1.1. PPTA represents approximately 17,500 secondary teachers, principals, and manual and technology teachers in New Zealand; this is the majority of teachers engaged in secondary education. Approximately 90% of eligible teachers choose to join PPTA.
   1.2. Under our constitution, all PPTA activity is guided by the following objectives:
       1.2.1. To advance the cause of education generally and of all phases of secondary and technical education in particular.
       1.2.2. To uphold and maintain the just claims of its members individually and collectively.
       1.2.3. To affirm and advance Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

2. **General comments**
   2.1. PPTA welcomes this inquiry and is pleased to be able to submit on this often under-emphasised area. The focus of PPTA members' work is the learning that takes place in school, but we are well aware that students' development and learning that takes place outside of school is essential for success in the realm that teachers have the greatest influence on.

   2.2. The focus of this inquiry, on parents, whānau and caregivers, takes a different angle from much educational policy development and discourse. This presents an extra challenge. To an extent it will be possible for the findings and recommendations of this inquiry to focus on what schools and educators can and should do, but this will only address part of the picture. Unlike when developing policy for schools and teachers, there are not the same legislative tools to bring about change; rather than the traditional mechanisms of making change in schools which rely on things like the Education Act, the curriculum or assessment system, or the collective agreements that apply to teachers, this inquiry, to be successful, will have to take a broader, more nuanced approach, which may have to explore wider social policy too.

   2.3. In this regard PPTA would like to caution the Committee against taking a punitive approach towards parents and whānau when considering recommendations about engaging them in their children's education. An example of this approach is evident in the welfare reforms, under which "Benefit payments may be affected for parents who do not take reasonable steps to enrol their child/ren in ECE."[1] PPTA believes that a strengths based, capacity building approach would be far more effective, and would avoid the disastrous consequences for children if parents' incomes are cut.

   2.4. This submission is informed by a number of PPTA publications and reports, along with other New Zealand and international research that provide useful insight. These are listed at the end of the document. The PPTA Conference paper, Equipping Schools to Fight Poverty; A Community Hub Approach is attached in full, as it is of particular relevance to this inquiry.

   2.5. In so far as the Select Committee recommends changes for schools and teachers, PPTA would like to caution about two things. One is that teachers are already exceptionally busy and they simply cannot be loaded up with new roles and expectations, unless there is a clear and commensurate lessening of expectations in another area. This is amply

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[1] ECE. Social Obligations, Available from
http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/RecentAnnouncements/ECESocialObligation.aspx

demonstrated in the NZCER survey of teachers which showed teacher morale at its lowest ebb in ten years, and 37% believed that their workload is so high that "they cannot do justice to the students they teach".[2] The other caution is that schools are simply not resourced adequately, either in staffing or operations funding, to take on these extra roles. The Ministry of Education has refused to move on implementing the recommendations of the Secondary Staffing Review, completed in 2012, and admits that they do not know how much it costs to run a well-functioning school.[3] The only explanation as to why the Ministry has not inquired into this is that they do not want to know the answer; when such an inquiry was carried out in Australia with the Gonski review, it showed that major new investment was required. PPTA has no doubt that the same would be found here if this, long overdue, process was carried out. The same NZCER survey quoted above shows that parents placed funding as the second most significant of 14 issues facing their schools, while teachers, principals and trustees all placed it at number one. If the Select Committee is serious about the recommendations that this inquiry makes, it cannot side-step this pressing issue, and must commit the government to resourcing schools sufficiently to enact their enhanced role.

3. Why Parents, Caregivers and Whānau Matter for Educational Success

3.1. PPTA welcomes the implicit acknowledgement by members of the Select Committee that learners' backgrounds matter. All too often teachers have felt as if this reality is ignored in the development of education policy and the discourse around it. Ministers have tried to lay the blame for educational underachievement of some students solely at the feet of teachers with comments such as "Too many of the kids falling behind <u>because they are not getting the quality teaching</u> and leadership that all the evidence tells us makes the difference are Māori and Pasifika learners, those who come from low socio-economic homes, or have special needs".[4] Policies such as charter schools are premised on the idea that schools in some areas are 'under-serving'[5] their students, failing to recognise the complex interactions of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, family background and other individual characteristics that contribute significantly to this state of affairs.

3.2. The proportion to which individual characteristics that students bring to school (such as family background) have an effect in terms of student achievement versus factors that schools and teachers control matter has been extensively researched and is still hotly debated. Since the seminal 1966 report "Equality of Education Opportunity", which showed

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[2] Wylie, C. 2013. Secondary Schools in 2012, Main Findings from NZCER National Survey, available from http://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/Secondary%20Schools%20in%202012-web.pdf

[3] This is revealed in the paper to Cabinet, Education Report, Determining At Risk Payments for Partnership Schools, 12 July 2013, where it states: *"Note, that since we do not have research or modelling for state schools that identifies how much it costs to run a well-managed school, it is difficult to set the percentage at a level where the school is still viable"* Available from:
http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/PartnershipSchools/InfoRelease/ApplicationPhaseBriefingsAdvice.aspx

[4] Hekia Parata, speech notes, Raising Achievement for All in Budget 2012, available from http://www.national.org.nz/Article.aspx?ArticleID=38508

[5] Press release, Parnership Schools| Kura Hourua: funding focuses on raising achievement, 15 May 2013. Available from http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/partnership-schoolskura-hourua-funding-focuses-raising-achievement

the significant impact of family backgrounds, this has been a highly politicised and controversial topic.[6] Various researchers have come up with a range of figures as to how much difference schools make as opposed to other factors. Hattie's widely used research states that students' individual characteristics account for around 50% of variance in achievement, home factors account for around 5-10% of variance (while acknowledging that much of the 50% in individual characteristics are related to this), and schools and teachers and account for around 35-40%.[7] A different figure is cited in the Best Evidence Synthesis, Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling (2003) which states that 59% of variance is attributable to school or teacher effects, [8] which presumably leaves 41% to individual and family characteristics. Nevertheless, as the Office of the Children's Commissioner working paper on Parents' Families' and Whānau Contributions to Educational Success notes, "Because of the complementary nature of these environments [school and home], there is little to be gained from debating which is *more* important".[9]

3.3. What this research shows, as teachers have long known, is that teaching does matter, as well as the context and background that students are from. Instructions to teachers and principals that they should ignore student backgrounds, and if they don't they are simply holding low expectations, are unhelpful and unrealistic. Schools cannot shut out the world that our students live in, and good pedagogical practice clearly shows that we should not try to do so either.

3.4. Families are also known to be a very significant influence on students' thinking about their future study and work options beyond school. This influence can be positive, but it can also be negative. For that reason, it is important that schools find effective ways to communicate with them about career possibilities, and to involve them, along with their children, in decision-making about course options and future directions. Schools are not well-resourced currently for careers work. Careers New Zealand has produced a set of benchmarks describing what an excellent careers information, advice, guidance and education programme would look like in a secondary school, but they have no ability to resource that. Too much of the careers resourcing that does go into schools is not targeted and is at risk of being directed into other areas, and there is no tagged and roll-based staffing for careers advisers.

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[6] Gamoran A & Long, D. 2006 Equality of Educational Opportunity, A 40 year retrospective. Available from http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/workingPapers/Working_Paper_No_2006_09.pdf
[7] Hattie, J. 2003. Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence? Available from http://www.education.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/education/shared/hattie/docs/teachers-make-a-difference-ACER-(2003).pdf
[8] Alton-Lee, A. 2003. Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis. Available from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/7705/BES-quality-teaching-diverse-students.pdf
[9] Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013. Working Paper, Parents' Families' and Whanau contributions to educational success, Available from http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Reports/Education/Parents-family-and-whanau-contributions.pdf

4. Addressing the particular terms of the inquiry

4.1. Investigate the elements of an effective strategy for engaging parents, families, whānau, aiga, and communities in education

4.1.1. It is interesting to note some of the various ways in which different governments have tried to engage the wider community in education issues in the past, and some of their successes and failures. Two historical examples are the Education Development Conference of 1972-1974 and the significant changes brought in under Tomorrow's Schools. Both of these initiatives were about engaging society in educational issues much more actively than they had been previously, not simply in terms of getting parents involved in supporting their own children's learning, but on much wider terms.

4.1.2. The Education Development Conference asked for wide public participation and input on three areas of concern; Educational Aims and Objectives, Improving Teaching and Learning and Organisation and Administration of Education. Over 60,000 people participated in regional discussion groups organised around the country on these topics, and a bold and radical programme for change was advocated in the final reports which summarised this discussion. This included recommendations to give parents and local communities much greater control over local schools, and that the national system of examinations be phased out altogether and replaced with internal assessment set and marked by teachers. The conference recognised that, "The objectives of the educational system as a whole, or of any part of it, are based on values, and as the values of society change so will a school's aims. However, it is precisely when the community is unable to agree on values and is divided by moral issues, that teachers find their task most difficult and their attempts to help their pupils with these problems most open to question".[10] This is relevant for the discussion today as we grapple with the perennial questions around education as credential gathering, preparation for participation in the economy, or more ambitiously, as described in the Thomas Report of 1944, "'the full development of the adolescent as a person and to prepare boys and girls to assume an active place in our New Zealand society as worker, neighbour, homemaker, and citizen."

4.1.3. Tomorrow's Schools, as Cathy Wylie writes, had a significant emphasis on "schools working more closely with their communities"[11] and of course handed governance of individual schools over to parents – a policy without precedent around the world. In theory this should be a crucial way for parents to engage with the education of their children; in practice this has largely failed to come about. In the initial flush of engagement only two of the 2700 newly self-managing schools could not find sufficient parents willing to take up the responsibility of joining a Board of Trustees. Recent data on Board elections shows that this enthusiasm has not continued. PPTA agrees with Wylie that part of the reason for this may be that we ask too much of school Boards, and a major risk of this system is the unevenness of expertise that school boards bring to bear to this complex role. Parental engagement with their children's school and

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[10] Education Development Conference. (1974). *Improving Teaching and Learning. Report of the Working Party on Improving Teaching and Learning* Wellington, Government Printer.

[11] Wylie, 2013, Vital Connections. NZCER Press: Wellington, p 89

learning does clearly matter, but as Wylie points out "even … good boards cannot substitute for the educational knowledge that schools need to improve student learning."[12]

4.1.4. At this point it may be worth pointing out one proposed strategy to engage parents in their children's education that PPTA has no doubt will not work. This is the current fad for encouraging school communities to set numeric targets for achievement for their school, like the BPS targets. Parents, quite rightly, see right through this – for one, they want their own children to succeed, and despite NCEA and standards based assessment, many parents feel that 'educational success' is a limited commodity. Secondly, many parents recognise the distortions and unintended consequences that can occur if numeric targets are set as the main goals of schools. Schools' vision statements, developed by Boards in consultation with communities, express aspirational and holistic ideals for their students, not achievement rates

4.2. To identify the best practice examples of approaches, locally and internationally, that support parents and communities to encourage their children's learning

4.2.1. Something that is apparent in a lot of Ministry of Education material about schools' engagement with families and community is that there is little understanding of the differences between secondary and primary schools. The role of parents is less visible in a secondary school, but is in many ways even more important. Research tells us that secondary students whose parents are engaged in their learning have a significantly increased chance of educational success. This must be mediated through adolescence where teenagers are less likely to sit comfortably with their parents unless the right event has been staged or the right approach has been taken.

4.2.2. One of the most successful ways to engage whānau has been via the learning conference. While schools all over the country have been working with this type of meeting, Learning Auckland have set it as a goal that every school in Auckland should have these type of conferences going on. These conferences invite parents and student at a pre-arranged time to meet with the form teacher to discuss learning, career and life goals, often around a portfolio of work that the student has assembled. We ran a story on these types of conferences in our PPTA news September issue. Our October issue also has a piece on school-home partnerships. Relationships with whānau are something we encourage and champion in our PPTA News.

4.2.3. The resourcing required for schools to make learning conferences work is primarily staffing. There are great demands on pastoral staff to organise the conferences, facilitate the meetings between parents and teachers, and on the form teachers to gather the material from the various subject teachers. Following up on the commitments made at these conferences also takes staff time. Despite the fact that schools often collapse regular classes for the day during learning conferences, there is

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[12] Ibid p 173

significant commitment of time both before and after the conferences to make them work.

4.2.4. There are a plethora of initiatives that schools use to engage different parts of the school community. Wainuiomata High School, for example, held a whānau hui on the local marae where Heads of Faculty and learning areas had stalls that helped explain how they work with students in their subject. This was a powerful way of connecting with whānau who may not feel comfortable at the school, but are extremely interested in their students' education. All schools have to shape their methods for engaging whānau around the specific audience they are trying to reach. The schools who act as hubs for their local community do this with more fluidity and more impact than those who operate as islands.

4.2.5. Connecting with whānau can also be resource intensive. Some schools access external funding, such as such initiatives, but this is not the norm. When meeting with whānau on marae there are costs associated with respecting tikanga, such as koha for the marae and food for participants.

4.2.6. The very good Office of the Children's Commissioner's working paper on Parents', Families' and Whānau Contributions to Educational Success defines three areas of family life that have an impact on children's success at school. All three of these are amenable to some extent to influence by the government. These are their demographic or SES circumstances (income etc… which government can improve though better employment policy and more even distribution of resources); attitudes and values (which government can model); and behaviours (which government can gently nudge). The area we are engaging with under this heading are behaviours. For many middle class families, involvement in their children's education, assisting with learning, providing resources, time and expertise is an accepted part of the educational journey. However, this is not the same for all families and government needs to do more in supporting schools to have hui on the marae, to become mobile in their delivery of information around students. All this costs money and should be supported.

4.2.7. Schools that have an open door and activities with parents like kapa haka, rugby games, sports competitions, learning opportunities (Adult Education), cultural festivals, arts festivals, careers expos and numerous other ways to get parents engaged with the wider life of the school, are likely to do better at engaging parents with the educational side of their child's journey as well. Partnerships with organisations like the Mana project which was a partnership between the Health Promotion Agency and Wainuiomata High School enable communities to wrap around students in ways that engage whānau more fully. The challenge of doing this within current resources and alongside current management practices is not to be underestimated.

4.2.8. Currently, external funding that is available for such projects is often contingent on meeting short term measurable output targets, and building up parental capacity and engagement with education is resistant to this. Too often the Ministry declares programmes to be ineffective and withdraws the funding because there hasn't been evidence of an immediate and linear connection to a lift in student achievement. New Zealand struggles to implement well-thought out, well-resourced, long-term educational

initiatives that are subject to review and modification in the light of evidence. Instead we are bedevilled by short-term, politically-charged, projects that are marketed as "success stories" well before there is any evidence of outcomes (eg charter schools). Schools become hostages to political fortune, committing themselves to implementing the latest idea only to find it may be unceremoniously dumped in favour of a new political enthusiasm.

4.2.9. It is too early to be certain that the Pasifika Power UP joint initiative between the Ministries of Education and Pacific Island Affairs can be counted as a 'best practice' approach yet, though it clearly offers some promise. The strengths based, community mentoring approach clearly is similar to the recommendation below from the OECD around mentoring and schools tapping in to community assets. We note that the recognition that this involves extra work for teachers, which they are paid for above their usual salary, is positive. However PPTA is concerned that the intention to make this 'sustainable' may mean it is sustained through locally raised funding or simply good-will rather than continued government support.

4.3. What do we know works?

4.3.1. The schools that succeed most are the ones that are truly embedded in their communities. This can be assisted by policy levers that allow schools to operate more as hubs for their communities. There is an opportunity to grow schools' abilities to provide medical services, counselling services, books, learning opportunities and resources to their local community. The more parents are in the school for positive reasons of engagement the more likely they are to be developing strong learning pathways in consultation with their child, their teachers with good information and advice to support their choices.

4.3.2. As described above, there are three areas of family life which the government will need to consider when making policy or funding decisions to enhance their engagement with schooling. The OECD report, Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools (2012) points out that economically disadvantaged and migrant parents are less likely to be engaged in their children's education. The suggested policies to counter this are as follows:

4.3.3. *Use diverse communication channels: Formal arrangements to link parents and schools may not work for disadvantaged groups (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). Communication with heterogeneous groups of parents has to be strengthened, and in many cases diversified (beyond to the traditional report cards and newsletters). Schools need to identify ways to work with parents to enhance their skills and enable them to provide more informed support for their children. This can include schemes with financial, logistic and expert support, and actions such as home visiting and communitybased initiatives in adult and parental education (MacBeath et al., 2005).*

4.3.4. *Ensure balanced communication: Particularly for children of parents who are less familiar with the working of schools, their behaviour and achievements need to be relayed to parents in a balanced way (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). If the only information reaching home is bad news, there will be little chance of winning support*

from parents for the efforts being made at school. A diversified teaching force (see policy point 3) can also facilitate the communication between schools and parents and present information in more relevant ways.

4.3.5. ***Target efforts to reach out to certain parents:*** *Esler, Godber and Christenson (2008) recommend that schools proactively and systematically identify families who are not yet involved in their children's schooling and extend personalised invitations to become involved – whether the child is performing well or not in school. This sends the message to parents that the school values the child and his or her progress (Dumont, Istance and Benavides, 2010). Box 3.13 presents relevant programmes aimed at obtaining support of specific groups of parents.*

4.3.6. ***Provide clear guidelines on what is expected from parents:*** *Schools should seek to encourage interaction between teachers and parents through explicit guidelines on how parents can contribute to their child's schooling, in particular with homework. Examples of what the guidelines can include are: finding an appropriate place to study; devoting sufficient time to homework; helping their children with assignments but not completing them; and conveying messages about the value of homework and particularly its relationship to children's educational goals and those of the school.*

4.3.7. All of these recommendations, while undoubtedly presenting useful options for schools, will fail to have an impact if they are simply added to the expectations of what schools are to accomplish within the current resourcing model. It has been clear in the past that extra expectations on schools can be loaded on through such methods as adjusting the Education Act or other legislative tools, adding extra focuses to ERO reviews, or creating new reporting and accountability measures through agencies such as the NZTC. Though it may be tempting to go down this route, it is would be an abrogation of responsibility by the Committee.

4.3.8. In the main, the demands of meeting the above recommendations in schools would fall on middle managers, guidance and pastoral staff. As the Secondary Schools Staffing Group report (2011) (which was agreed on by the Ministry of Education, School Trustees Association, Principals' Association, Principals' Council and PPTA) noted, there is not a good understanding of the current use of guidance and management time, and "there is not information whether the pattern of guidance [and management] entitlement is appropriate in secondary schools or on what ratio of students to guidance hours is most appropriate either generally or by decile".[13] They went on to recommend that a needs-based funding model be explored, and that the current funding model is "potentially not the right fit for 21st century student/school needs".[14]

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[13] Report of the Secondary School Staffing Group, 2012, strand 1. p 11. Available from
http://ppta.org.nz/index.php/resources/publication-list/2164-sssg-report-final
[14] Ibid, Recommendations.

4.4. To identify ways to leverage the strength of communities to lift the educational achievement of children and young people in their community.

4.4.1. The PPTA paper which is attached describes in detail the Association's view on policies which will enable stronger community-school connections. Along with this, PPTA endorses the recommendations of the OECD on this area, from the same Equity and Quality (2012) report cited above. In regards to connecting schools and communities the report recommends:

4.4.2. Support the building of links between schools and their communities

4.4.3. Learning depends also on a range of actors around a "learning community" (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007): the surrounding community is an indispensable partner in children's education. Communities can offer a wide range of valuable resources for disadvantaged students and schools, such as volunteer tutors, adult mentors and enrichment programmes for students (Furco in Dumont, Istance and Benavides, 2010). Mentoring migrant students, especially by mentors of migrant backgrounds, is often found to be an effective approach in providing additional educational support and raising the self-confidence of immigrant students (OECD, 2010f).

4.4.4. In return, schools can become resource centres for community development (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). They can work closely with community health, recreation, youth, police and other local institutions to address external student and family obstacles to students' learning. In some education systems, schools offer on-site professionals who provide complementary services directly to students and their parents. Evidence shows that such extensions of school services attract families that would otherwise be unwilling to be involved. The initiative Century Community Learning Center Program in the United States is one example, aiming at transforming schools into community centres by providing extracurricular structure and stimulation as well as supplementary instruction in reading for all.

5. Conclusion

5.1. The decision by the Education and Science Select Committee to investigate the challenges involved in engaging parents is a worthwhile and positive initiative. However, it will all be for nothing if the outcome is a litany of instructions to schools on how they might do more. Schools are sometimes able to spin straw into gold but policy cannot be designed around exceptions. If New Zealand is serious about increased parental engagement in schools then it needs to consider how schools may be resourced and supported to achieve these outcomes.

6. Recommendations

1. That the Committee advocates the following strategies for schools to use to better engage parents, whānau and communities in their children's learning:
   - Learning conferences
   - Schools as hubs of social, health and community recreation and education provision
   - Diverse methods of communication between school and home
   - Targeted communications to at risk parents
   - Providing clear information on what is expected of parents

2. That the Committee considers the other operational and infrastructural funding needs of schools in regards to delivering these strategies.
3. That the Committee investigate a means of funding and supporting recommendation 1 including consideration of the pastoral, guidance and management staffing needs of schools in regards to delivering these strategies as recommended by the Secondary School Staffing Group.
4. That parent focussed strategies take a strength-based and non-punitive approach.
5. That the Committee considers the need for increased support to schools, including improved resourcing, to enable them to meet the high standards for careers education outlined in the Careers Education Benchmarks, including improved resourcing for careers advice programmes, as well as for careers work in the school as a whole.

Appendix

Equipping Schools to Fight Poverty: A Community Hubs Approach, PPTA Conference Paper

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munity_hubs_2013.p