

Communicating about NCEA



Affirm the strength and uniqueness of NCEA.

Present NCEA as a well-designed, inclusive, and flexible qualification tailored to New Zealand's diverse learners.

Emphasise that NCEA:

- Has broad international recognition.
- Supports multiple pathways – academic, vocational, and kaupapa Māori.
- Is already working well for many students and does not need to be scrapped.

Assert that NCEA is uniquely ours – it belongs to Aotearoa and reflects our values and diversity.



Keep Young People and the Public Good at the Centre

Ground all messaging in the needs and aspirations of students. Highlight how NCEA:

- Helps young people find purpose, build curiosity, and prepare for life.
- Contributes to the wider social good by supporting community wellbeing, equity, and opportunity.

Frame teaching as a role that helps grow informed, capable, and socially connected citizens – not just workers.



Use Values-Based Messaging to Build Trust

Anchor communications in widely held values, such as:

- Fairness: Every learner deserves a chance to succeed in a system that meets their needs.
- Whanaungatanga: Learning thrives through connection – between teachers, students, whānau, and schools.
- Wisdom and purpose: Education should help young people grow into thoughtful, capable citizens.

Frame NCEA as a system that, when supported, can live up to these values.



Frame the Real Problem as Policy Instability and Under-Resourcing

Make clear that the real issue is not NCEA itself, but repeated, rushed, and under-resourced changes imposed on schools.

Describe how this churn undermines teacher morale, destabilises classrooms, and disrupts learning.

Name what is needed: stability, collaboration, and time for schools to implement changes well.



Use Clear, Simple Explanations and Narratives

Communicate with a clear narrative chain:

- What is the issue?
- Why is it happening?
- Who does it affect?
- What needs to be done?

Use metaphors to clarify complex ideas. For example:

- Scaffolding: “NCEA gives learners support until they’re ready to stand tall.”
- Gardening: “Young people grow at different rates – the role of teachers is to nurture them.”
- Waka paddling: “We move forward fastest when we paddle in time – schools, whānau, and government together.”



Show What Success Can Look Like

Offer tangible, hopeful solutions:

- Teachers need time and support to adapt to change.
- Collaboration between teachers, not top-down directives, leads to innovation.
- Clear, phased implementation is essential for any reform to succeed.

Name who needs to act (e.g., the government must resource changes properly), and what that action should involve.



Draw on Positive Examples

Highlight real success stories – especially those that reflect:

- Collaboration across schools and communities.
- Integration of mātauranga Māori and culturally sustaining practices.
- Student-centred approaches that improve engagement and achievement.

These stories build public trust and show that progress is possible when teachers are supported.



Avoid Crisis Rhetoric and Fatalism

Resist the urge to frame NCEA as “broken,” “in crisis,” or beyond repair. These messages invite apathy or destructive overhaul.

Instead, speak of NCEA as a living system that has strengths, faces challenges, and can be improved with the right support.



Avoid Unhelpful Frames

Don’t lean on narratives of teacher martyrdom or exhaustion – they reinforce helplessness rather than change.

Avoid technical language or slogans. Speak plainly and with purpose: e.g., “*Young people need different things to thrive – NCEA makes that possible.*”

Don’t mix “future workforce” rhetoric with holistic education messages. These frames clash and confuse.