

Annual Conference 2025



KĀHUI AKO DISESTABLISHMENT - THE LESSONS NOT LEARNT

A PAPER FOR THE NZPPTA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report be received.
2. That the PPTA advocate for an independent evaluation of the Ministry of Education's policy development and implementation processes, including the impact of the Tomorrow's Schools system on national initiatives.
3. That the PPTA advocate for the Ministry of Education to develop and publish a robust, resourced change management framework for all new education policies and initiatives, grounded in consultation and peer-reviewed evidence, and subject to ongoing evaluation.
4. That the PPTA advocate for investment in secondary education to the value that was removed by the Kāhui Ako disestablishment, with priority given to initiatives that support teacher recruitment and retention, provide time and support for professional learning and inquiry, and strengthen collaboration within and between schools.
5. That PPTA consider the value of an expansion of the Specialist Classroom Teacher model and inclusion of this into the PPTA vision.
6. That a report be prepared for the PPTA Executive detailing the work lost as a result of the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako and that NZEI Te Riu Roa and the Kāhui Ako Association are asked to collaborate in the development of the report.

1. DISESTABLISHMENT OF KAHUI AKO

- 1.1 In the 2025 budget, funding for Kāhui Ako¹ was terminated to use largely on funding government policy initiatives in years 1-8. The staffing order for 2026 does not include the time allocations for the Kāhui Ako roles and indeed deletes all reference to the roles.
- 1.2 There is little evidence of consultation by the Minister with the sector prior to making the decision to disestablish Kāhui Ako to fund her other policy priorities.
- 1.3 This paper argues that there are significant lessons to be learned about how to introduce and support future government initiatives in education from the experience of Kāhui Ako.

2. HISTORY

- 2.1 In 2010, the OECD identified a persistent global gap between educational research and classroom practice.² Kāhui Ako, introduced as part of the 2014 Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative, aimed to bridge this gap by fostering collaboration across schools and embedding research-informed practice into everyday teaching. The initiative, supported by PPTA, sought to improve outcomes by enabling teachers to share expertise, support smooth student transitions, and work collectively across communities.
- 2.2 Although the initial cabinet model was not widely supported, key elements aligned with PPTA policy: voluntary collaboration among schools with shared interests, and the creation of new teaching roles—Leadership, Across Community Teachers (ACT), and Within School Teachers (WST). Sector-led working groups, including the Ministry, PPTA, NZEI and NZSTA, developed detailed guidance to support effective implementation.
- 2.3 Essential to success were locally shaped goals, genuine collaboration, and time to build trust. A national appointments panel (NANP) was established to ensure quality in leadership and ACT appointments—an independent quality assurance mechanism unique in the system.
- 2.4 Between 2017–2019, underspent funds were used to provide Expert Partner support—offering Kāhui Ako guidance in data use, evidence-informed planning, and goal-setting. In 2024, the first national Kāhui Ako conference was held, leading to the formation of Kāhuinga Manatōpu, the Kāhui Ako association. This group is now developing a statistical evaluation tool and an online resource hub. In 2025, PPTA signed a memorandum of understanding with the association to strengthen collaboration and ongoing development.

3. FAILURES OF LEADERSHIP

- 3.1 From the start, there were problems. From the outset, high remuneration for Kāhui Ako roles created resentment among middle leaders, and the Ministry's policy and implementation arms operated in silos, leaving regional offices underprepared. Schools were pressured to join before trust or clarity around purpose had developed, and early constraints on achievement challenges limited shared ownership.

¹ Initially called Communities of Learning and then Communities of Schools. We use the current name for them in this paper.

² *Effective learning: constructive, self-regulated, situated and collaborative (CSSC learning)* OECD *The Nature of Learning : Using Research to Inspire Practice* 2010, p56

3.2 Engagement depended heavily on individual principals, with many schools joining for funding but not engaging meaningfully. Support structures were weak and short-lived, and little was done to foster networking or knowledge sharing. Over time, the withdrawal of monitoring, advisory groups, and funding signalled a shift away from collaborative reform, as cost-cutting measures increasingly shaped policy decisions. By 2024, with staffing for Inquiry Time removed and regional advisers disbanded, the initiative had lost coherence and institutional support.

3.3 In 2023, the Accord set up a working group of representatives of the Ministry of Education, PPTA, NZEI and principals on:

- the requirement to form around a learner pathway;
- exploring the ongoing role of the New Appointments National Panel (NANP);
- changes to achievement challenges;
- exploring future resourcing and delivery across and within-school teacher roles;
- exploring future resourcing and delivery of the leadership roles;
- exploring further with the early childhood sector about how the model can be improved for them.

3.4 There were no obvious outcomes from the report to the Accord, other than a successful PPTA claim that year for a more flexible use of the Within School Teacher allowances to expand the number of people who could be recognized for taking a role in the Kāhui Ako initiatives.

3.5 Despite these many failures of leadership, many successful Kāhui Ako developed and began ticking off successes; but a counter narrative of failure also developed.

4. WHAT PPTA MEMBERS THOUGHT IN 2017

4.1 In 2017, PPTA undertook a randomized survey of members in Kāhui Ako and had responses from over 1400 members covering 91% of Kahui Ako. The survey findings revealed a persistent gap between the initiative's intent and its implementation. While the underlying aims were generally supported, many teachers felt disconnected from the process. Consultation tended to be limited to principals, with few teachers experiencing the promised vertical collaboration, and even less engagement with parent communities.

4.2 A significant portion of teachers were unaware of their school's involvement or the purpose of Kāhui Ako, and there was limited consultation around achievement challenges, which in turn led to low ownership of those goals. Leadership structures were sometimes constrained, with concerns about fairness in appointment processes and the sustainability of the leadership pipeline. There were also tensions around workload and pay equity, particularly among middle leaders. New roles often overlapped with existing responsibilities without clear integration, and professional development was seen as insufficient.

4.3 Teachers reported little awareness of the resources available to support their work in Kāhui Ako, and there was minimal effort to share learnings or experiences across schools. Overall, the implementation fell short of fostering the collaborative, community-focused model originally envisioned.

4.4 The full report is here: [Implementation of Communities of Learning – practitioners' experiences](#). The findings suggested that there was a need to review and amend the implementation process at all levels.

4.5 Based on the feedback from this survey, PPTA made a number of recommendations for strengthening the system in a conference paper in 2017, [Communities of Learning: the slippage between planning and implementation](#)

5. WHAT MEMBERS WERE SAYING IN 2025

5.1 Following the announcement of Kāhui Ako disestablishment, PPTA ran an informal survey of around 680 members. While not representative of the full membership, the responses reflected strong views on both sides.

5.2 Slightly more respondents supported disestablishment than continuation—especially those who had never held a Kāhui Ako role. Their main reasons were that the funding could be better used elsewhere, the model hadn't worked in their experience, and the disparity in pay and conditions between Kāhui Ako roles and middle leaders.

5.3 Those who currently or had previously held Kāhui Ako roles largely opposed disestablishment. They valued the opportunities it provided for school collaboration, pedagogical leadership, and improvements in teaching practice and student outcomes.

5.4 Respondents who supported retention cited key benefits such as improved literacy and numeracy, better transitions, and more culturally responsive practices. For teachers, they highlighted the value of structured PLD, collaboration, and professional networks.

5.5 Across all groups, there was broad support for continuing elements like inter-school collaboration, PLD, mentoring, research, and teacher networks.

5.6 Within the responses there were essentially three types:

- I do not see it working in my school
- I see it working in my school
- It was working in this school I was in, but not the one I am in now.

The report can be found here: [Kāhui Ako | PPTA](#)

6. AVAILABLE EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE

6.1 The early removal of the Ministry's evaluation group during the rollout of Kāhui Ako created a major gap in evidence about its success or failure.

6.2 In the beginning, ERO published several papers on Kāhui Ako, such as [Communities-of-Learning-Kahui-Ako-Action.pdf](#). Over the past decade, the New Appointments Advisory Panel (NANP) has surveyed experienced school leaders and across-school teachers, gathering suggestions to improve the model. NANP has also published reports on successful Kāhui Ako, like those found at [Kāhui Ako o Te Motu Kairangi - Kāhui Ako Specific Reports](#). However, neither the Ministry nor the Minister has ever consulted the panel for expert advice.

6.3 Effective, easy-to-use tools for measuring student progress and achievement are now being used in more Kāhui Ako. These tools were developed and are continually improved by a former AST from Gisborne Boys' High School.

- 6.4 Kāhuinga Manatōpu continues to collect evidence on the effectiveness of individual Kāhui Ako initiatives. This helps share successful practices with other schools and preserves valuable insights for any future replacement of Kāhui Ako.
- 6.5 Despite this, there is no national-level evaluation of Kāhui Ako outcomes to justify its continuation or disestablishment. As of now, there are Official Information Act (OIA) requests seeking peer-reviewed research, reports, or advice provided to the Minister by education agencies.
- 6.6 As Ken Wilson stated at the Kāhuinga Arataki Conference on May 14, 2025:

“Critics of Kāhui Ako have no research-based evidence that the model isn’t working—none. The Ministry hasn’t gathered any evidence in nine years. No internal research, no commissioned studies, and no long-term evaluations. It’s a disgrace.”

- 6.7 One goal of Kāhui Ako was to retain skilled teachers. Yet, there is no research assessing how removing roles and responsibilities has affected teacher retention. In a non-randomised 2025 survey, about 14% of current role-holders said they might leave teaching due to losing their roles. This could worsen the secondary teacher shortage—a risk the Minister may not be able to properly assess due to the lack of evidence.

7. WHY OBJECTIVE RESEARCH EVIDENCE IS IMPORTANT

- 7.1 In her paper ‘Teacher Leadership: Lived Experiences of Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako Across Schools Teachers in Aotearoa | New Zealand, Julia Tod (see [Kāhui Ako | PPTA](#)) makes some insightful concluding observations. They are not about the statistical evidence for success or failure of specific initiatives within Kāhui Ako, but they relate to the importance of understanding and managing the dynamics of new initiatives:
 - Kāhui Ako were debatably a response to pressures on the government at the time, including to raise learner achievement, especially for the most underserved, and so close the gap between underachievement and achievement, and to retain effective teachers in the education system.
 - Intentional, purposeful, and meaningful connections were key to increasing the connectivity among and between educators.
 - It is both the quantity and quality of interactions that matters.
 - Commitment and belief in the principles underpinning Kāhui Ako for New Zealand schooling communities was always going to be difficult considering the significant paradigm shift required from an entrenched culture of competition to one of collaboration.
 - Genuine buy-in and sustained commitment from all involved is critical; only educators who actively engage and seek learnings from their colleagues are likely to report higher levels of improved professional practice and reap the rewards of network participation.
 - Expanding formal teacher-leader roles through government policy can be an effective strategy for addressing teacher retention if those roles are carefully designed, implemented, and supported
 - There is appetite for policies that inevitably enable teacher-leader working conditions that support professional growth career opportunities.

7.2 Tod³ also notes the challenges facing Across Community teachers including:

- perceived power dynamics,
- lack of commitment and collaboration by principals and senior leaders,
- colleagues' resistance, and
- a lack of communication protocols:

7.3 This reminds us that anecdotal feedback to the Minister on any educational initiative may reflect things other than the potential impacts of an initiative, and has to be heard in conjunction with independent, objective analysis of the initiative and wide consultation with the sector.

8. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

- 8.1 The decision to disestablish Kāhui Ako was made without presenting clear evidence that redirecting its funding will lead to better outcomes for students or schools. While PPTA supports change that is considered, evidence-based, and properly resourced, the Minister did not consult with the sector - principals included - nor did they provide any evaluation to justify ending the initiative. This lack of transparency and engagement undermines confidence in the decision-making process.
- 8.2 Initially, there was to be an ongoing programme of evaluation and assessment of the IES initiative, but it was dropped unilaterally by the Ministry early in the process. In retrospect, it is clear that the sector, including PPTA, should have actively lobbied harder for the continuation of that longitudinal evaluation of Kāhui Ako. This was a missed opportunity – especially once the moratorium on creating new ones was imposed. Without a structured evaluation, we were left with anecdotal evidence and mixed perceptions. Some members reported strong, positive outcomes from their Kāhui Ako, while others experienced little benefit or even additional pressure. This suggests that success was highly context-dependent, and that a more nuanced understanding was needed before making system-wide decisions.
- 8.3 Rather than asking whether Kāhui Ako were effective or not, a more useful approach would have been to investigate what attitudes, practices and conditions led to success and how those could be supported or replicated across the system. Key questions should have included: What does success look like in this context? What practices, supports or structures contributed to that success? Are those factors transferable to other schools or clusters?
- 8.4 Evaluating the characteristics of successful Kāhui Ako could have revealed adjustments to structure or practice or supports that might improve outcomes nationally. It could also have identified cost-effective ways to scale local successes and highlighted the preconditions necessary for future initiatives to succeed. Understanding these factors would help avoid the patchwork success that often accompanies national education reforms.
- 8.5 Perceptions of success or failure should also have been tested with data. For example, if a principal believed their Kāhui Ako improved student attendance, that perception should have been supported by comparative data, clear links to specific initiatives, and evidence that those outcomes were directly tied to the Kāhui Ako structure. Similarly, if there is a

³ [Tod also discusses the difficulties and implications of returning from Kāhui ako roles to full time teaching.](#)

perception that there was no impact in their school, then that perception could be tested empirically. Without this kind of evaluation, decisions associated with tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, affecting hundreds of thousands of students risk being based on anecdote rather than evidence.

- 8.6 Finally, the lessons from Kāhui Ako could have informed future policy and resourcing decisions. If success was not achievable in all contexts, then it would be important to ask whether new initiatives are likely to succeed more broadly, or whether they too will face similar limitations. A structured evaluation would have helped identify what supports are necessary, what barriers exist, how to constructively engage school leaders and teachers in the initiatives, and how to design initiatives that work across diverse school environments.
- 8.7 In summary, the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako highlights the need for robust evaluation before making major policy changes. It also underscores the importance of sector consultation and the value of learning from both success and failure. PPTA should advocate for structured, evidence-based reviews of all major initiatives to ensure that decisions are informed, equitable, and effective.