



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021


COVID-19: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?



PPTA Te Wehengarua | PO Box 2119, Wellington 6140 | p. +64 4 384 9964 | e. enquiries@ppta.org.nz
File Number. G/E/AC/2021



CONTENTS



Recommendations	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Equity.....	3
3. Wellbeing	4
4. In teachers we trust	5
5. The value of technology	5
6. Conclusion	8

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That the report be received.
- 2 That this conference urges the government to prioritise achieving equity in our society
- 3 That this conference calls on the government to fund schools so that all students have access to suitable devices and internet connectivity
- 4 That this conference calls for all schools to be funded so that they can maintain and upgrade their devices as required
- 5 That this conference reaffirms the importance of having adequate guidance counsellor positions in all secondary and area schools.
- 6 That this conference calls on the ministry to support the development of ICT skills for teachers
- 7 That this conference calls for schools to be provided with additional staffing for technical support.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. A crisis is often a litmus test for a society and the organisations within it. This paper explores the issues for teaching and learning that arose during the pandemic and uses these as a springboard to identify the risks and possibilities for the future of education. The glaring lessons were about equity, wellbeing, the importance of the teacher, and technology. The pandemic reinforced what we already knew about these important areas but amplified them and exposed them in their stark reality.

2. EQUITY

- 2.1. We know that we live in an inequitable society. PPTA Te Wehengarua has regularly urged the government of the day to address this issue. This government has made some efforts and since 2017 all nine child poverty measures have been trending downwards. We welcomed the \$25 per family benefit increase as part of the initial COVID-19 response and the decision to index benefits to average wage growth from 1 April 2020. But the economic impact of COVID-19 on some members of our society has been brutal. In the latest Child Poverty Action Group report¹ poverty, inequity, homelessness and food insecurity have all increased, and more so for tamariki Māori. More families than ever face the stress of ongoing food insecurity due to income inadequacy. It estimates 18,000 more children have been pushed into poverty, even before housing costs are considered.
- 2.2. The lockdown period highlighted existing inequities, disparities and divides within our education system, too. Obvious examples were that students did not have access to suitable devices. This may have been because there was no device, the device was a phone, the device had to be shared with a number of siblings, or with parents who were working from home. Less obvious were the connectivity issues: poor internet connections or no internet connections at all. Some had devices and connectivity but nowhere to work. Others had the device and connectivity but not access to the software that they needed to further their studies. For others they had the device and connectivity but not the parental support, the social connections, the key competencies, or were just plain anxious.
- 2.3. PPTA has supported initiatives to address inequity in schools. In May 2020 there was a major expansion of the school lunch programme, funded through the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, which went from feeding nearly 8,000 students to around 200,000 per day. School lunches have been used in many countries to address inequality. In addition, more schools have opted into the donations scheme for 2021, compared to 2020 when the scheme was introduced. It is estimated that the families of more than 447,000 students are better off, with 94% of eligible schools opting into the scheme.
- 2.4. The Equity Index is another aid in the pipeline. PPTA believes the index is a tool that better reflects the actual level of socioeconomic disadvantage faced by children than the school decile system. The index considers the whole school population when assessing the level of disadvantage in a school and because it uses a broad measure of educational success funding will better reflect the equity challenge at each school.²

¹ Child Poverty Action Group (July 2021) The first year of Covid-19: Initial outcomes of our collective care for low-income children in Aotearoa New Zealand

² <https://www.education.govt.nz/news/replacing-deciles-with-the-equity-index/>

- 2.5. Over the years there has been an expectation that schools are to take increasing responsibility for student health and wellbeing, student rights and family input/control, alongside the demand for increased accountability, requirements to help students negotiate the secondary/tertiary interface, demand for personalising of learning and for providing increasingly diverse learning pathways and multiple opportunities for students to succeed. These expectations come from both the government and the community.
- 2.6. PPTA Te Wehengarua has advocated for schools to become community hubs providing full-service sites that offer extensive wraparound services in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. COVID-19 has highlighted how students need a range of social, psychological and health support if they are to learn.³
- 2.7. The ministry did a great job in supplying schools with devices and striking deals with Telcos to make sure students had connectivity. This needs to continue along with funding so that schools can maintain and upgrade these devices as required.
- 2.8. The government's COVID-19 response (like the America's Cup) has shown that the money is there when they believe something is important. Will they feel strongly enough to continue to address these ongoing inequalities?

3. WELLBEING

- 3.1. The lockdown and subsequent return to school highlighted the importance of student wellbeing. One of the key messages from Jacinda Ardern during COVID-19 lockdown and the return to school was "be kind". This too is the message extolled by the Ka Hikitia, the Māori Education strategy: put learners and whānau at the heart of our education system. For many teachers, the lockdown period provided an opportunity to build or strengthen their relationships with students and whānau as it offered greater insight into the home lives of their students and opened up new channels of communication.⁴ This was a positive outcome of the lockdown and something teachers want to continue.
- 3.2. On the worrying side, even before the anxiety-causing pandemic, wellbeing was at crisis point. In her 2018 survey⁵, Andrews found that 91 percent of school guidance counsellors were unable to see all of the students who wished to be seen, and 14 percent had waiting lists longer than 10 days. Clearly, students not seen for this length of time are at risk. In addition, as guidance counsellors can only manage their workload by prioritising the students who want to see them, they have to give up early intervention work, with the potential for issues to worsen over time.
- 3.3. When the guidance counsellor is unavailable, DPs, APs, deans and form/whānau teachers end up becoming pseudo-counsellors for some students. This becomes a workload issue for them and may mean they find themselves managing complex student issues outside their expertise.
- 3.4. We may need to look to the past for ways to remedy this crisis. Before Tomorrow's Schools, all schools with a roll over 400 were expected to employ a guidance counsellor. Schools that had 200-400 students

³ Equipping schools to fight poverty: a community hub approach

⁴ Learning from Lockdown

⁵ Andrews, J. (2018) 'Results of NZAC Executive Portfolio Holder survey', Dunedin

were able to appoint a 0.6 guidance counsellor position. Larger schools generated additional positions at rolls of 1200 and 1800. Since the removal of the tagged positions, it has become harder to attract and retain experienced guidance counsellors. School rolls and counselling caseloads have increased, often without a comparable increase in guidance counsellor time. The needs of students have become increasingly complex. Clearly the pastoral care of students needs support and perhaps a return to tagged guidance counsellor positions at a ratio of one guidance counsellor per 400 students in all secondary and area schools.

4. IN TEACHERS WE TRUST

- 4.1. We know teachers are adaptable and creative, and COVID-19 confirmed this. Pasi Sahlberg calls for the need to trust teachers to do what is best for every child in the school”.⁶ March-April 2020 showed the resourcefulness, diligence and ingenuity of teachers and principals. With lightning speed schools transformed themselves into distance providers. This didn’t happen painlessly: teachers worked long hours, they reworked their lessons, they made videos, they learnt new technology, they contacted their students through email, Facebook, messenger, TikTok and zoom. Principals communicated with parents and whānau, reassured staff (especially the immune-compromised), organised new timetables, developed staff support trees, and in some cases delivered devices and paper resources to students. Some schools even continued to provide for whānau: 23 percent of schools in a poll during Alert Level 3 reported distributing food and clothing packages to whānau in their community⁷.
- 4.2. In many schools, teachers supported colleagues personally and professionally. They shared their knowledge of ICT and their teaching resources. Beeby’s⁸ dream of “for teachers by teachers” is alive and well.
- 4.3. These were challenging times and many parents gained a new respect for teachers when they saw what was required in the day-to-day, never mind those who went above and beyond. COVID-19 in its weird way reminded us that schools are, or should be, the heart of their communities. Some principals reported how after the return to school family and whānau seemed more comfortable communicating with the school.
- 4.4. Perhaps this experience will reassure boards, the Ministry, and the Teaching Council that teachers are trustworthy. “Too many people in the schooling system do not trust each other or understand the contribution that each makes to the whole.” (Tomorrow’s Schools Review)

5. THE VALUE OF TECHNOLOGY

- 5.1. Asked what part of their remote learning experience teachers would like to integrate into their onsite teaching programme, the most common responses were: ‘greater use of technology’ and ‘more

⁶ Sahlberg, P. After the virus: In Teachers We Trust – Blog 2 Oct 2020

⁷ ERO Report (2020). Learning in a Covid-19 World: The Impact of Covid-19 on Schools

⁸ Clarence Beeby, Secretary of Education circa 1940s

flexibility for students to engage in self-paced learning'. Teachers saw the power of technology to bridge distances, to link people, to personalise and enhance learning.

5.2. The NZ Curriculum emphasises the potential of ICT to enhance learning.

e-learning may:

- assist the making of connections by enabling students to enter and explore new learning environments, overcoming barriers of distance and time;
- facilitate shared learning by enabling students to join or create communities of learners that extend well beyond the classroom;
- assist in the creation of supportive learning environments by offering resources that take account of individual, cultural, or developmental differences; and
- enhance opportunities to learn by offering students virtual experiences and tools that save them time, allowing them to take their learning further.⁹

5.3. The integration of ICT into schools' practices carries with it the implication that students will have access to computers and the internet both at school and at home. Students whose total use of ICT occurs only at school cannot be expected to match the confidence, capacity and, eventually, achievement of their more fortunate peers¹⁰.

5.4. What do teachers need?

When considering next steps, it's important to acknowledge the difference between 'emergency remote teaching' and 'blended or online teaching' and that the experience of the former is not what teachers aspire to.

5.5. Teachers need education in online (ICT) pedagogy. Teachers realise that what they do face-to-face in the classroom cannot just be replicated online. The potential of new technologies to transform teaching and learning is heavily dependent on teachers' abilities to see the opportunities and capacities of ICT in relation to learning. For this to happen teachers need support and guidance to learn the possibilities of new ways of working. This is difficult when teachers have workload concerns, and PLD of any form is difficult to access. In addition, there is a scarcity of e-resources for teachers to use, and designing and developing them from scratch is a skillful and very time-consuming enterprise.

5.6. A teacher experienced in blended learning spoke at the recent PPTA Te Wehengarua Staffing Summit and likened using ICT effectively in the classroom to being a beginning teacher again, the experience was so different. She estimated that it took twice as long to plan a lesson and interestingly spoke of the importance of class size - in the region of 1:20. Those who think that ICT is a cheap option are sadly mistaken.

5.7. What do teachers need?

- Teacher laptop, separate screen, keyboard – this is a health and safety, productivity and workload issue.
- ICT skills for teachers

⁹ MoE (2005) The New Zealand Curriculum

¹⁰ *ibid*

5.8. What do schools need?

- sufficient devices to provide students who don't have them
- technicians to be able to assist students and teachers so that lessons run smoothly and to assist with digital examinations
- the ministry to negotiate software access. It makes no sense to have 2500 schools each making individual contracts.
- good security, so that information is stored safely, and systems to prevent students accessing unsuitable material, accidentally or purposefully.
- charging stations so that students don't run out of power and are able to participate.
- extra staffing to acknowledge the additional required in time in their first years as a "beginning teacher of online pedagogy".
- devices, spaces and connectivity for students to be able to do NCEA examinations digitally.

The operations grant is not enough for schools to cover these aspects.

5.9. What do students need?

Access to devices at school and home, and connectivity at home. They need school spaces with ventilation, appropriate lighting and ergonomic furniture. Failure to provide these in addition to too much time on devices has serious consequences:¹¹

- Musculoskeletal problems
- Vision problems
- Repetitive stress injuries
- Headaches
- Obesity
- Stress disorders
- Laptop use injuries
- Sleeping problems
- Hearing loss from headphones
- Increased risk of blood clots

5.10. In addition to physical safety, the emotional safety of students is critical. A look at Netsafe advice shows some of the risks

- Advice on how to talk to your child about porn
- Social media advice for parents
- Helping tamariki spot fake news
- Helping young people exposed to upsetting content
- Advice for parents about online grooming
- How to talk to your child about sexting
- Online bullying: advice for parents

¹¹ <https://www.microhealthllc.com/top-ten-computer-related-health-problems/>

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1. COVID-19 has taught us some vital lessons that we ignore at our peril. Some of these, like equity, are so important they must be addressed immediately. It is not enough to say that they will be addressed in the ten-year plan. Every student who loses out on the opportunity of a fulfilling education is a tragedy. The solutions come at a cost; failure to act comes at a greater cost.