



# Standing for Public Education



This was first presented to the *Issues and Organising Conference 2024 Charter Schools Workshop*. It is available to download from the campaigns tab on the website and will be updated regularly.

## ‘PPTA Te Wehengarua supports a fully funded public education system’ says President Chris Abercrombie

We have a large variety of schools already in the New Zealand system which, compared to other countries, is *already* highly devolved.

“We’ve got huge flexibility that already exists within the system. We’ve got state, we’ve got state-integrated, we’ve got special character, we’ve got religious... we’ve got alternative education, we’ve got private schools, we’ve got single-sex, co-ed, we’ve got small, large, urban, rural”.

Abercrombie said the focus should be on public education through which the vast majority of students received their education.

“Building up our public school system, funding it properly, having qualified registered teachers in front of every young person and having subject specialists, that should be our focus, not getting public money to private individuals to run schools as they see fit.”

“We know what works. What works are the very opportunities that advantaged families provide for their children. In homes with adequate resources, children get advantages that enable them to arrive in school healthy and ready to learn.

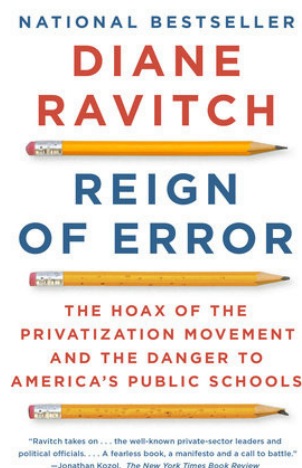
Discerning, affluent parents demand schools with full curricula, experienced staffs, rich programmes in the arts, libraries, well-maintained campuses, and small classes. As a society, we must do whatever is necessary to extend the same advantages to children who do not have them.

Doing so will improve their ability to learn, enhance their chances for a good life, and strengthen our society.”

Dianne Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatisation Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools* (2013)



Dianne Ravitch – Historian and education policy analyst. Former US Assistant Secretary of Education (reformed). Activist on behalf of public schools since 2010.



While every attempt has been made to ensure all information is correct, we cannot guarantee that this booklet will not become 'out of date'. Please check our website for the latest version as the content will change through our campaign.

# What *is* a Charter School?

These state-funded schools are run independently of the government by non-profits or businesses and previously catered primarily to “priority learners” – those who had historically struggled more. This included many Māori and Pasifika students, and those with additional learning needs like neurodiversity. However, we know that ACT is wanting to expand the charter school experiment outside of these priority groups.



In the USA, where charter schools were invented, there is a lot of top-down and onerous red tape that public schools have to work with. In Aotearoa New Zealand, with our self-governing schools, we already have high levels of whānau, parent and community input into how our schools are run. The only reason to import this experiment into our context is to provide money-making opportunities for unscrupulous businesses and to ‘break the unions’.

Internationally, charter schools are able to employ untrained teachers in both leadership and classroom positions. International evidence is that these untrained ‘teachers’ often require high levels of support, putting a strain on both their wellbeing and that of any trained teachers employed in the school. These charter schools also have a high turnover of staff, who often have to work excessive hours in order to meet the expectations of the school sponsor/owner.

The official explanation for wanting to see charter schools in Aotearoa New Zealand is to improve outcomes for priority learners by allowing innovation, and supposedly encourage underperforming state schools to improve in a ‘competitive market’.

We do not believe competition has any place in a public education system. We also do not see any evidence – internationally or locally – for charter schools improving the public system. In fact, outcomes for students in charter schools are not usually any better than their peers in public schools.



# A brief history of PPTA Te Wehengarua Opposition to Charter Schools

Did you know that all PPTA Te Wehengarua policy is member-led? Annual Conference is where all policy is debated and voted on by our delegates who represent all of the regions around the motu. Our members have consistently said ‘no, thankyou’ to charter schools.

In 2005, a conference paper\* **Threats to Public Education** reaffirmed PPTA Te Wehengarua’s opposition to the threats to the public education system of: the bulk funding of salaries, the privatisation of state schools, the introduction of the competitive school model, site or individual contracts

The 2010 PPTA Te Wehengarua annual conference opposed PPPs (public private partnerships) in the “absence of evidence that they provide long-term cost savings...efficiency, or innovation”. The paper **Private Profiteering or Public Private Partnerships** also noted that the concept of partnership in this case was a misnomer, as it was not the “warm relationship between equals...but an exploitative relationship whereby the public purse is raided by privateers bent on extracting profit”.

Annual Conference in 2013 took a “brave and unequivocal stand” against charter schools, determining not to “do anything to assist charter schools”.

The 2015 report **Charter Schools: An Update** provided a summary of “the failure of the charter school experiment to provide an improved alternative to the public education system in New Zealand”.



\*All of these conference papers are available on our website under the Charter Schools Campaign Tab



It's not just about the policy though - *he tangata, he tangata, he tangata*. It is about the people.

Vocal and consistent opposition to these schools by PPTA Te Wehengarua involved a lot of hard work for many of our members, particularly in Te Tai Tokerau, where Māori communities were targeted by proponents of charter schools. Some of our members found themselves eye-to-eye with their own whānau, and it was a difficult fight for many. We owe these members our gratitude.

As a result of our members' mahi, charter schools were restricted to just eleven nationally, with just over 1400 students enrolled. Keeping them small meant that when the Labour/ New Zealand First government was elected in 2017, they were able to follow through on their election promise - to abolish charter schools.

All of the charter schools, except for one, successfully integrated into the state system after that, proving they never needed their special status in the first place.

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**There's a private part  
National and Act  
don't want you to see  
this summer.**



# Why does PPTA Te Wehengarua Oppose Charter Schools?

## It's Who We Are

- We are the kaitiaki | guardians of public education
- We have a long standing opposition to privatisation and neo-liberal reform agenda
- We are member driven, with robust democratic structures

## Specific Objections

- Charter schools shift resources from the public to the private sector
- There is a lack of transparency expected with public funding and spending
- Charter schools undermine the professionalism of teachers
- Charter schools undermine the connection between schools and communities
- Charter schools have an impact on the school network
- Charter schools have had inadequate evaluation and Health and Safety processes
- Charter schools are politically rather than educationally driven

PPTA believes that all students in Aotearoa New Zealand must be guaranteed a **high quality education at their local state school**. Charter schools operate as private businesses, are bulk funded and operate under commercial contracts. The scheme is designed to privatise the public education system.



# What's likely to happen this time?

Our response to a new round of charter schools will focus on the positive aspects of the state school system and to continue to show why charter schools are not needed.

## **The announcement of the Charter School Establishment Board confirmed fears of 'conversion' of state schools to charter schools**

"I hope and intend to see many new charter schools opening, and state and state-integrated schools converting to become charter schools," Seymour said, when he announced the board.

## **Members' jobs at risk**

This poses an even bigger risk than the last time charter schools were introduced in 2014 because it would mean PPTA Te Wehengarua will have members in charter schools. Members may need to join a different union such as ISEA NZ.

Members' jobs will be at risk as the schools will likely be forced to 'close' and all positions disestablished upon conversion.

Students who are taken from the rolls of state schools also take away funding that goes to that school, leading to a possible loss of funding for teachers, teacher aides, learning support and more.

## **Māori and Pasifika likely to be targeted again**

It seems likely that, as happened when charter schools were introduced in 2014, Māori and Pasifika will be targeted again, demonstrating the "rank hypocrisy" of the ACT party calling their charter schools 'partnership schools' while in the same breath calling for a referendum to effectively abolish the partnership principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We know that ākonga Māori need better outcomes; we need to fully fund our public education system and resource our innovative professionals to make those changes – alongside iwi Māori and our school communities.

Grassroots, branch-based campaigns will be needed to enlist the support of parents and put pressure on boards of trustees, similar to the campaigns against the bulk funding of salaries fought by branches in the 1990s.



# Our campaign

As we prepare for the Paid Union Meetings, we are still in the planning phases of our campaign – mostly because we don't yet know the substance of the new legislation. However, the following is a taster of what this will entail. We are currently holding workshops around the motu to gather member voice and ideas. Keep an eye out for when a workshop will be held in your region.

## Party politics– government & opposition

- We will be putting pressure on the government – consistently a 'friendly voice'
- We will also be continuing our advocacy with opposition parties

## Policy makers

- We will engage constantly with agencies such as the MoE and Treasury
- Use of the Official Information Act to find out as much as possible
- Continue to be credible experts in the field of education

## Education sector

- We will continue to work with other education unions, standing on common ground, sharing information and resources
- This ensures that multiple voices are giving the same message



## Media & public

- We will continue to be credible experts in the field of education, sought out for our opinions
- We will shine a light, challenging mistruths
- Demonstrate the strengths and flexibility of the public system

## PPTA members – generally and locally

- Teachers and principals are the best advocates for our issues
- Ensure members are well informed
- The 'ban' on supporting charters still stands – both symbolic & practical
- Local activism
- Social media campaign and tools for members

# So, what to do now?

A paper presented at 2023 Annual Conference, **Charter Schools and Privatisation**, called on the PPTA to remain steadfast in our opposition to charter schools, and to oppose the conversion of existing schools.

Recommendations sought for the PPTA to advocate for increased flexibility to allow for innovative approaches to education within the state and state-integrated school system.

The recommendations in full are:

1. That the paper be received.
2. That PPTA Te Wehengarua continues its implacable opposition to the establishment of new charter schools (or te kura hourua, partnership schools or whatever they may be called), and the conversion of state or state-integrated schools to charter schools.
3. That PPTA Te Wehengarua advocates for increased flexibility to allow for innovative approaches within the state and state-integrated school system.
4. That PPTA Te Wehengarua affirms its support for an equitable and well-resourced public education system.

You can access this conference paper and find further information on the PPTA website through the 'Campaigns' tab.

Make sure you are signed up to receive the toolkit, and keep an eye out for a campaign workshop in your area.

Have conversations with your friends and family, colleagues and others in your school community.

Attend your local regional meetings to hear more and have your say.

# What can you do?



## On your socials

Amplify pro-public education content  
Create content to support the campaign

## In your branch

Proactive lobbying school boards as a branch  
Discuss the reasons to remain a fully public school  
Discuss with parents at school events



## In your community

Host pro-public school conversation in your communities  
Stalls at public events, attending wānanga and hui

## In your electorate

Lobby your local MP  
Encourage them to make a public statement  
supporting public education



Keep an eye on our website, the PPTA News and the Collective News to find out about events happening in your area, and how to access resources and support for your local activities



# What do we want to see in our public education system?

PPTA Te Wehengarua is committed to a strong and fully-resourced **public** education system.



Contribute your voice  
to our campaign!



Scan here to access the feedback form.

# What if your school is targeted to convert to a charter school?

We understand that some schools around the motu have already been visited, and the Associate Minister of Education has been having conversations with principals and boards regarding a conversion to charter school status.

This is an attempt to introduce bulk funding by stealth, something that our members fought off in the 1990s. Bulk funding will inevitably lead to cuts in co-curricular and result in larger class sizes as principals try and balance the books.



**STANDING FOR  
PUBLIC EDUCATION**

**PPTA**  
Te Wehengarua



Scan here to register for a PPTA toolkit to support you when having conversations in your school community about Charter Schools.

Our toolkit will be available very soon after the legislation is announced. Register advance for a toolkit by scanning the above QR Code (or click the link on our campaigns page) if you think your school is in line to be targeted.

You can also contact your Field Officer or email [public.education@ppta.org.nz](mailto:public.education@ppta.org.nz) for advice and support. PPTA Te Wehengarua staff will be available to assist school branches if they are facing conversion, or simply want to know more.