

## Education Report: Workforce Wellbeing response to COVID-19

|   |  |                     |         |
|---|--|---------------------|---------|
| <b>To:</b>                                    | Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education |                     |         |
| <b>Date:</b>                                  | 16 September 2020                        | <b>Priority:</b>    | High    |
| <b>Security Level:</b>                        | In Confidence                            | <b>METIS No:</b>    | 1240426 |
| <b>Drafter:</b>                               | Laura Fair                               | <b>DDI:</b>         | 9(2)(a) |
| <b>Key Contact:</b>                           | Deborah Kent                             | <b>DDI:</b>         |         |
| <b>Messaging seen by Communications team:</b> | Yes                                      | <b>Round Robin:</b> | No      |

### Purpose of Report

1. This paper seeks your agreement to actions to support the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce in response to COVID-19 and its recent resurgence in Auckland.

### Summary

2. In May, Cabinet agreed to provide funding to support education workforce mental health and wellbeing in response to COVID-19, which resulted in a \$16m allocation in Budget 2020 for schools, kura and early learning services over the next three years.
3. COVID-19 has created unprecedented, significant and wide-reaching impacts on the wellbeing of teachers and school leaders. Supporting the wellbeing of the education workforce is not only an important priority in itself; it also contributes to supporting learners to succeed and manage their own wellbeing.
4. As a priority under the Accord, the Ministry has been working alongside NZEI and the PPTA and other key education sector groups and has reached consensus on the proposed COVID-19 wellbeing package. The proposed package includes counselling and advice services to commence in Auckland as soon as possible, as well as longer term initiatives including a wellbeing online hub and supports for the Māori medium education workforce.
5. Funding is sought from the \$16m workforce wellbeing allocation. Subject to your approval, we will work alongside Accord partners to immediately implement and communicate the initiatives. We will also monitor service uptake and impact to inform the development of further COVID-19 related spending proposals for your consideration in early 2021.

## Recommended Actions

---

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- a **Note** this paper proposes initiatives to provide support and resources for educators from the \$16m included in the Budget 2020 COVID-19 Response and Recovery package initiative to increase wellbeing and mental health support to learners and education workforce
- b **Agree** an initial \$8.94m package of initiatives over three years to support the wellbeing of the education workforce in early learning, school and kura settings in response to the impacts of COVID-19 and its recent resurgence:
- i. Immediate term: Auckland COVID-19 resurgence counselling and advice: individual sessions and group workshops ☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree
  - ii. Contingency to enable immediate delivery of EAP in locations or regions experiencing further resurgence ☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree
  - iii. Procurement of an online wellbeing hub through a third party ☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree
  - iv. Initiatives for the Māori medium education workforce ☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree
  - v. Evaluation of the package to inform ongoing implementation and development of further options ☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree

EITHER

- c **Agree** that you will announce the workforce wellbeing package ☒ Agree / ☐ Disagree

OR

- d **Agree** that the Ministry work with the accord and sector partners to publicise the package Agree / ☒ Disagree
- e **Note** the Ministry will work with Accord partners and other public sector agencies, including the Ministry of Health, to undertake further current state analysis, to evaluate uptake and effectiveness of the package of initiatives. This will include using evidence based solutions inform further design work, reporting back to you in early 2021 on

I'd like to announce this as one of the first tangible 'deliverables' from the Accord. CH

additional initiatives within this budget envelope for 2021/11 and 2022/23 including consideration of:

- the importance of recommendation b) above to be rolled out nation-wide as promptly as possible
- targeted short term initiatives for Māori and Pasifika workers to be undertaken by the appropriate groups as promptly as possible

f **Note** the Ministry will work with your office to develop a communications approach and materials on these initiatives.



Pauline Cleaver  
Acting Deputy Secretary  
**Early Learning and Student Achievement**

16/09/2020



Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Education**

24 / 9 / 2020

## Background

---

6. On 11 May 2020, as part of a COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, Cabinet approved funding “to increase the provision of wellbeing and mental health support to learners and the education workforce in response to COVID-19” [CAB-20-MIN-0219.09 refers]. This included funding of \$16m over three years for “increased access to workplace assistance for educators”. In your media release you stated that the funding was for workplace assistance and counselling support services for the education workforce and their families, intended to benefit 10,000 additional teachers and other school staff by 2022.<sup>1</sup>
7. The Ministry has been working with the Accord wellbeing sub-group to agree options for increasing access to workplace assistance for educators in response to COVID-19. The sub-group is chaired by Jack Boyle, the President of the Post-Primary Teachers’ Association (PPTA), with representation from New Zealand Principals’ Federation (NZPF), Secondary Principals’ Association of New Zealand (SPANZ), New Zealand Education Institute (NZEI) and New Zealand School Trustees’ Association (NZSTA), Te Akatea Māori Principals’ Association, New Zealand Kindergartens Association. Officials from the Ministries of Education and Health, the Ministry’s Chief Science Advisor and the Education Review Office are also members.
8. Supporting the wellbeing of the education workforce is an important priority in itself and also contributes to supporting learners to succeed and manage their own wellbeing. In recent principal and board chair interviews conducted by the Education Review Office (ERO), 73% of schools reported experiencing one or more challenges relating to exhaustion and sickness, teacher stress about workload, teacher anxiety about health, or principal stress.<sup>2</sup> Boards also reported that they were experiencing an increased demand for access to EAP and trauma supports. An earlier study from June also identified mental health as one of the biggest areas of concern with 13% of teachers reporting concerns around mental health. This increased to 22% for teachers under the age of 35 years.<sup>3</sup> There are additional concerns about the magnified effect of the COVID-19 resurgence on the education workforce in the Auckland region.

## Proposed approach to support education workforce wellbeing during COVID-19

---

9. We propose initiatives that both respond to locations or regions experiencing COVID-19 resurgence and provide additional support to the workforce nation-wide. We propose an adaptive approach that responds to emerging COVID-19 impacts. This includes close monitoring of the nature and demand for services and ensuring that education workforce wellbeing is supported in culturally responsive and appropriate ways, including for Māori and Pacific educators.
10. We therefore seek your agreement to an initial allocation of \$8.94m from the total \$16m three year budget envelope. We will continue to work with our Accord partners and Māori and Pacific peak bodies and report back to you early in 2021 with additional expenditure proposals.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/covid-19-support-improve-student-attendance-and-wellbeing>

<sup>2</sup> Education Review Office (August 2020), *Covid-19 Impact on Schools and Early Learning Services – Interim Report*. Unpublished

<sup>3</sup> Education Review Office (June 2020) *Covid-19 Learning in Lockdown*

**Immediate term: Introducing a COVID-19 resurgence package of counselling and advice, starting in Auckland (\$6.2m over 3 years)**

11. The resurgence of COVID-19 has shown a clear demand need for counselling and support services for staff in Auckland, and this is likely to be the case should any further resurgence occur in this or other localities or regions.
12. Responsibility to offer Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) services rests with individual schools' and kura Boards of Trustees as part of their employer health and safety obligations. EAP is not centrally funded so we do not have a clear picture of the size, reach and possible gaps in the current service offering. Not all Boards offer EAP services, so there may be gaps in provision for some staff. A priority in the coming months will be to better understand the demand and supply trends for EAP in response to COVID-19. The intent is to supplement rather than replace existing EAP services funded by Boards of Trustees. Boards not currently providing EAP services will be encouraged to do so as good employers.
13. We recommend you agree to provision of a Ministry-held contract up to \$6.2 million in 2020/21 only for additional EAP services to be provided free of charge to staff in state and state integrated schools, kura and all early learning services in locations experiencing COVID-19 resurgence at level 3 and above:
  - for a period of up to three months
  - up to three individual one-on-one counselling sessions per person (either in person or on the phone)
  - participation in one group workshop per person.
14. If you agree, we will commence procurement with the expectation the services will be offered in term 4 to the Auckland region. The estimated cost of \$4.2m over three months is based on an uptake rate of 20% for individual sessions and 30% for group sessions. These services alone are expected to provide support to between 12,000 and 20,000 education sector workers in Auckland.
15. It is recommended that \$2m be set aside to fund the initiative in any location that may experience further COVID-19 resurgence events in 2020/21. Should this not be required, we would seek agreement to carry over the funds to 2021/22.
16. While the likely level of demand is unknown, we consider it important to act now rather than attempt to cover all eventualities. The uptake of volume for EAP in Auckland will be monitored to enable demand and supply issues to be identified and addressed and we will report on options for further expenditure in early in 2021. This could include the option to extend delivery of the proposed group workshops to the national education workforce. We will also focus on ensuring that initiatives are designed and delivered in culturally appropriate ways, particularly for Māori and Pacific educators.
17. We will do further work to understand the level, nature and cultural responsiveness of current support services and to ensure that any additional COVID-19 related support that may be provided to the education workforce over the period does not substitute but appropriately builds on existing services.

## Over three years: Introducing a wellbeing hub and supports for Māori medium education workforce

### **Workforce wellbeing hub (\$1.5m over 3 years)**

18. COVID-19 has amplified the need for targeted information and supports to the education workforce that are relevant to their contexts and easily accessible. Online hubs that support workforce mental health and wellbeing are currently offered by a number of public sector agencies including the Ministry of Education, Te Puni Kōkiri, Inland Revenue and New Zealand Police.
19. We recommend that \$1.5m be allocated over three years for the development and operation of a wellbeing hub to provide additional support for the education workforce of around 137,000 and their whānau New Zealand-wide. The hub would provide a range of activities, advice, information and supports including education sector specific content, long with opportunities for peer to peer supports.
20. The proposed budget allocation for the hub is time limited through to 30 June 2023 with no provision for funding in out years. Decisions about whether the Government investment will be realised past this point will need to be made at that time.

### **Supporting the wellbeing of the Māori education workforce (up to \$1m over 3 years)**

21. The importance of utilising mātauranga Māori approaches in the design and delivery of services is well evidenced. We consider that the sector, community groups, iwi and others should be provided with the opportunity to apply localised wellbeing solutions that enable Te Reo Māori, Tikanga Māori and Te Ao Māori.
22. Subject to your agreement, working with Māori medium peak bodies we will consider options for targeted short-term initiatives for Māori and Pacific workers and who is best placed to undertake them. The relevant carve out from the \$16 million package to fund initiatives over three years for schools, kura, kōhanga reo and early learning services to meet the wellbeing needs of the Māori medium workforce could, for example, be disbursed by the Ministry through a contestable fund with applications considered on a case by case basis.

### **Evaluation of proposed initiatives (\$250,000 over 3 years)**

23. We recommend that \$250,000 be allocated over three years to measure and evaluate the proposed initiatives. This will include formative evaluation to measure uptake along with initial evidence of short-term impacts as well as outcome evaluation at the end of the initial funding period.

## Financial implications

24. The following table details the funding identified as part of the Budget 2020 for increased access to workplace wellbeing support for educators.

*Table A: Three year funding profile from Budget 2020*

| Sought (\$m)         | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | Total  |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| Total Vote Education | 7.850   | 4.650   | 3.488   | 15.988 |

25. The table below details the cost of initiatives proposed in this paper. We seek agreement to fund initiatives from the \$16m Budget 2020 workforce wellbeing budget allocation.

*Table B: Funding sought from 2020 workforce wellbeing Budget allocation*

| <b>Initiative (\$m)</b>   | <b>2020/21</b> | <b>2021/22</b> | <b>2022/23</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Auckland COVID-19 resurgence counselling and advice                           | 4.200          |                |                |              |
| Provision for additional regional COVID-19 resurgence: counselling and advice | 2.000          |                |                |              |
| Māori medium initiative   | 0.340          | 0.330          | 0.330          | 1.000        |
| Wellness hub  | 0.500          | 0.500          | 0.500          | 1.500        |
| Evaluation  | 0.083          | 0.083          | 0.083          | 0.250        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>7.120</b>   | <b>0.910</b>   | <b>0.910</b>   | <b>8.940</b> |
| <i>Funds remaining to be allocated</i>  | <i>0.730</i>   | <i>3.740</i>   | <i>2.578</i>   | <i>7.048</i> |

26. Of the \$16m over three years, \$7.048m would remain unallocated. We will provide you with further spending proposals in early 2021.

## Risks and Mitigations

27. There are a number of uncertainties associated with implementation of the initiatives.

| <b>Risk</b>  | <b>Mitigation</b>  |
|--|--|
| <b>COVID-related supports are not what is needed</b>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement, contract management and evaluation</li> <li>• Accord members will provide 'real-time' information</li> <li>• Report back in 2021 will enable adjustments if required</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Package raises expectations of long term provision of services</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement and contracts will have clear end points within 3 years</li> <li>• Communications to emphasise COVID-19 response and recovery focus</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Supports provided are inaccessible or inappropriate for diverse education workforce</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiatives will be monitored and evaluated over 3-year period</li> <li>• Accessibility and inclusion will be strong focus for procurement, contracting and evaluation</li> <li>• Ministry will work with the Accord and Māori medium and Pacific peak bodies</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Demand for services is greater or less than anticipated</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$7.048m set aside for possible further supports</li> <li>• Demand and uptake monitoring will be put in place</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Criticism of Auckland favouritism</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two initiatives have nation-wide focus – wellbeing hub and Māori medium initiatives</li> <li>• Communications package will emphasise range of existing education and 'all of government' support services available to education workforce, and how to access</li> <li>• Further options for nation-wide provision to be developed</li> </ul> |

## Next Steps

---

28. Subject to your approval, we will implement the proposed initiatives and report to you regularly on progress. We will report to you with possible further spending proposals in early 2021. As part of this process we will work with the Ministry of Health, Accord partners and sector groups and to better understand the health and wellbeing needs of the workforce in the context of COVID-19 and identify evidence-based options.
29. We will work with your office on communications, including the approach and associated communications content closer to the time of implementation. We propose to collaborate closely with education sector peak bodies to coordinate communications on the package of initiatives. In the meantime we will use Ministry channels to remind ECE providers and schools to promote existing resources and services to their workforce.

## Proactive Release

---

30. We recommend that this paper is proactively released as part of the government's communications regarding support provided to the education sector in response to COVID-19.