



Education Report: Workforce Wellbeing response to COVID-19 – Eligibility of Early Learning Services

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	4 December 2020	Priority:	High
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1245282
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

This paper seeks your agreement to extend counselling services and supports to playcentre parent volunteers as part of the COVID-19 workforce wellbeing response.

Summary

- In May 2020, Cabinet agreed funding to support the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce 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.
- In September 2020, you endorsed a range of initiatives to support the wellbeing of the education workforce in response to COVID-19. This included high-level decisions around the provision for free-of-charge access to counselling services for the workforce in state and state integrated schools, kura and early learning services in Auckland and provision for further resurgence. \$4.2 million was allocated to support the Auckland education workforce for a period of three months as a result of resurgence in the region and this was launched on 3 November 2020.
- Playcentre Aotearoa has asked whether their parent volunteers in Auckland are able to access this service. We recommend that counselling services be extended to playcentre volunteers, as playcentre volunteers are directly working with children as educators. It is also in line with the availability of these services to kōhanga reo volunteers.
- Extending the service to playcentre volunteers is estimated to cost \$163,000 which can be met from within the \$4.2 million budget allocation.
- We intend to provide you with a detailed progress report on the wellbeing initiatives, including uptake of the counselling services, in April 2021 along with recommendations to further support the wellbeing of educators.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- (a) **Agree** that playcentre parent volunteers working as educators access free of charge EAP counselling services and supports at an estimated cost of \$163,000, which can be met within the current budget allocation

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**

- (b) **Proactively release** this Education Report with any information that may need to be withheld done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982

☒ **Release** ☐ **Not release**



Deborah Kent
Associate Deputy Secretary
Early Learning and Student Achievement

04/12/2020



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

7 / 1 / 2021

Background

1. In May 2020, 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 \$16 million over three years for increased access to workplace assistance for educators.
2. In September 2020, we sought your agreement to an initial \$8.94m package to support educator wellbeing as part of the Government's COVID19 response and recovery budget initiative [METIS 1240426 refers].
3. Work is underway to implement the endorsed workforce wellbeing initiatives including an immediate \$4.2m package of counselling and support services for Auckland educators. Launched on 3 November 2020, additional free-of-charge Employment Assistance Programme (EAP) advice and group workshops on issues of concern are available to staff in state and state integrated schools, kura, and early learning services in Auckland.
4. Since the announcement, Playcentre Aotearoa has sought clarification for whether its Auckland parent volunteer educators are eligible to access EAP supports. This briefing seeks your agreement to enable playcentre parent volunteers to access this service.

Approach to workforce eligibility of early learning services

5. Our approach to date has focused on delivering supports to paid workforce in licensed early learning services. Unpaid kaimahi in kōhanga reo have also been included in the scope in recognition of the need to ensure the initiative applies across both English and Māori medium settings at all levels of learning.
6. To date, no decisions have been taken around whether to support unpaid playcentre educators.

Proposed approach for volunteer playcentre educators

7. Playcentre is a licensed early learning service that has a philosophy of parents and whānau as the first teachers of children. Playcentre Aotearoa is the service provider for all playcentres. The majority of their workforce are parent volunteers.
8. We recommend including provision for playcentre volunteers to access workforce wellbeing initiatives. We consider that this aligns with the wider policy intent to support the wellbeing of the education workforce in response to COVID-19. We also consider that through supporting the wider wellbeing of the playcentre parent volunteers, the Government is in effect further supporting learner wellbeing.
9. We have advised the Accord workforce wellbeing sub-group of our advice and they have not expressed concerns with the proposal.
10. We do not propose extending this provision to parent volunteers in other settings such as schools, however, as parent volunteers are not core educator roles in the way they are in playcentres.

Financial implications

11. The complexity and unpredictability of COVID-19's impact on wellbeing makes costing for counselling and support services difficult and we do not have a strong basis to forecast uptake.
12. For the purpose of estimating a cost as part of our advice to you in September, we initially modelled uptake on 20% for individual sessions and 30% for group sessions on a workforce size of around 41,000 based largely on payroll data. This yielded a cost of \$4.2m over three months. These assumptions are more generous than business as usual EAP uptake estimates to allow for any spike in support needed as a result of COVID-19 resurgence.
13. Data analysis undertaken since the workforce wellbeing package was launched has identified a larger Auckland workforce size, bringing the estimated total workforce size to around 50,000 across state and state integrated schools, kura and early learning services. This is an increase of 8,675 educators, including an estimated workforce of around 1,200 playcentre volunteers in Auckland.
14. We estimate that delivering EAP to playcentre volunteers in Auckland could incur a cost of \$163,000.
15. Even with the addition of volunteer playcentre educators, we are not currently expecting to exhaust the budget allocation. We will continue to monitor the volume of uptake for EAP and report back on usage and possible options for further expenditure in April 2021.

Next Steps

16. Subject to your approval, we will advise Playcentre Aotearoa about volunteer eligibility to access counselling services and supports.
17. We will provide you with a detailed progress report on the wellbeing initiatives in April along with recommendations to further support the wellbeing of educators.

Proactive Release

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