



Briefing Note: Final Update on Ongoing Resourcing Scheme COVID-19 Response Fund

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	23 July 2021	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1264823
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Purpose

This Briefing Note provides you with a final account of the distribution of the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) COVID-19 Response Fund (Response Fund), and an overview of how schools intended to use this funding in response to student needs.

Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.

Agree / Disagree

Summary

- An additional \$31 million was allocated in 2020/21 to support the attendance, engagement and wellbeing of ORS-verified children and young people following the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 lockdowns.
- The Response Fund provided schools with increased teacher aide time to enable students with the highest levels of learning needs to participate in activities and programmes to enhance their emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive outcomes.
- The successful allocation of \$28.9 million in two phases provided for equitable distribution of support for students with the greatest learning needs.



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23/7/2021

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Background

1. The Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) provides support for students with the highest levels of ongoing learning needs. The scheme enables 10,291 students (as of May 2021 which is approximately 1.2% of the school population) to attend school and participate alongside other students. Currently two-thirds of all New Zealand schools have one or more students supported through ORS, and there is a higher concentration of ORS students in low decile schools (deciles two to five).
2. Just over half of ORS students (55 percent or 5,698 students) are in Non-Fundholder schools where funding is managed at a regional level by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry). Fifty-six schools, known as Fundholder schools, manage the remaining 45 percent (4,583 students).
3. New funding in Budget 20 increased the average number of funded teacher aide hours per week for ORS students from 10 to 13 for high needs students and 17 to 20 for very high needs students.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic presented major disruptions to the everyday life and educational experience of ORS students, who needed help to adapt to changes in routine and to catch up on their learning.
5. Budget 20 also provided **\$31 million** additional funding to mitigate the anticipated effects of this disruption by increasing teacher aide support available to ORS-verified students in the 2020/21 year. This \$31 million came from two budget bids and became known as the ORS COVID-19 Response Fund (Response Fund).
 - a. A Wave 2 COVID-19 response bid of \$144.2 million over four years, with \$12 million from the first year allocated to the Response Fund, and
 - b. an ORS cost pressure bid of \$19 million, for 2020/21 only.
6. In the Education Weekly Update (EWU) of 4 February 2021, the Ministry forecast that some of the Response Fund would not be fully spent based on the number of applications received at that time. As part of the Budget 21 process, \$8.8 million was returned to The Treasury, which consisted of a combination of some of the allocated budget from the Response Fund, and budget underspends from the additional ongoing three hours per week per ORS student and the Teacher Aide Pay Equity Claim (TAPEC).

The impact of lockdowns on students with high learning needs

7. The Government correctly anticipated that children and young people with the highest learning needs would need additional help to transition back to school and re-establish routines. Lockdowns brought about school closures, and for some a change in family living circumstances. Many students with high learning needs had limited ability to access online learning during lockdown and were isolated from their normal support and peers.
8. In their applications for the Response Fund, schools articulated why additional support was needed and how it would be used. The example below provides a useful insight into the types of issues the Response Fund would be addressing:

"Students missed school [...] Families struggled to maintain connection and there were vastly limited opportunities for all children to engage in learning at home. There were students with limited living space, motel housing, students with high sensory needs were unable to have their needs met. This enhanced challenges and anxieties for students who were already compromised. The momentum of learning was interrupted [...] Students, when they arrived back at school, were dysregulated and incidences of challenging behaviour became more apparent".

9. Overall, the impact on students materialised as a marked increase in student anxiety, and dishabitation to routine. This in turn manifested in the classroom with re-integration problems, learning and behaviour regressions, and marked increase in antisocial behaviour, such as aggression.

Two phases of funding allocation with different purposes

10. Overall, the Ministry distributed \$10.3 million (93%) of the Response Fund for a wide range of activities for students with support from teacher aides. Distribution of the Response Fund was managed in two phases. In phase one, 60 percent of the available funding (\$18.6 million) was distributed to all schools with students who are ORS-verified through a lump sum in the 1 October 2020 operational grant funding payment. This resource was used by schools for additional teacher aide support to respond to students' immediate needs in returning to school and re-establishing learning routines.
11. In phase two (November 2020 – June 2021), the remaining 40 percent (\$12.4 million) of the Response Fund was allocated to the Ministry's 10 regions based on the number of ORS-verified students. Local decision-making by regional Directors of Education was prioritised to enable funding to reach those students with greatest needs. Schools could apply for phase two funding for additional teacher aide hours in Terms 1 and 2 of the 2021 school year. This included support for transitions, including the transition back to students' usual funded teacher aide hours after 30 June 2021.

Phase one

12. In phase one, all (10,155 as of 1 October 2020) ORS-verified students across 1,668 schools received additional teacher aide hours based on 69 hours per student.
13. At the time of the calculations, the Auckland region had entered their second lockdown. To account for this added pressure, schools in Auckland received a greater number of additional hours per student. Fundholder schools were allocated an additional 73 hours and students in Non-Fundholder schools received an additional 96 hours. The difference is because Non Fundholder schools tend to have fewer ORS-verified students, less flexibility and smaller economies of scale.

Phase two

14. To allocate phase two funding, the Ministry's regional teams worked with schools or clusters of schools on an application basis to co-construct a plan tailored to student needs. A total of 1,158 plans were submitted by schools, of which 1,133 were approved by regional Directors of Education.
15. A total of \$10.3 million was distributed, equivalent to an additional 407,599 teacher aide hours. This funding provided an average of 47 additional teacher aide hours per student, supporting a total of 8,780 students in 880 schools.

16. More information on the breakdown of funding by school regions and deciles, the students supported, and areas of support provided is presented in a dashboard format in **Annex one**. Key insights regarding funding allocation were:
- Teacher aide hours across both phases were proportionate to the distribution of ORS students across decile, with more hours allocated to students attending decile two to five schools
 - Māori and Pacific students received additional teacher aide hours at rates slightly higher than their representation among ORS students (Māori represent 26% of students and received 27% of additional hours, and Pacific represent 11% of students and received 16% of additional hours), and
 - Primary and intermediate schools and kura received the bulk of the funding (74%) compared to secondary schools and kura (26%), proportionate to the number of ORS learners supported at each level of schooling.

Intended outcomes and activities for students

17. Schools specified the intended outcomes supported by the Response Fund. Of the options specified in the applications, the top outcomes sought by schools were:
- engaging students with new learning experiences
 - increasing social competence and increasing emotional resilience
 - re-engaging students with current learning experiences, and
 - supporting student attendance and decreasing challenging behaviour.
18. The Response Fund helped schools to mitigate the negative impact of lockdowns on students and the classroom. Requests were made for additional teacher aide hours to enable participation in a wide range of activities and programmes, such as: Zones of Regulation Programme, Teacher in the Paddock programme, Lego Therapy and BRICKS club, Riding for Development (horse riding), swimming and community garden projects.
19. Schools also directed additional resources towards increased professional learning and development (PLD) such as Sensory Learning and Universal Design for Learning to implement a differentiated programme in the class.
20. Below is an example of how the Response Fund was valuable in helping the adaptation for a particular student with very high learning needs following lockdown:
- "Student has Down Syndrome, his parents separated during level 4 lockdown and he has struggled to understand this change in his living circumstances. This has manifested itself in increased oppositional and defiance behaviour at school. Student has limited verbal communication but using Makaton states he wants to be 'at Dad's house' rather than school [...] Student has frequently hit staff, damaged property and had severe meltdowns that have required the evacuation of the class [...] We would like to provide Student with additional TA support to help run an afternoon programme aimed at supporting identification of emotions and strategies for supporting emotional regulation with him."

Lessons learned regarding the administration and use of flexible funding

21. Through the Learning Support Delivery Model (LSDM), the Ministry is working in new ways to flexibly tailor support to meet the range of students' learning needs. The Response Fund provided an opportunity to learn how to distribute flexible funding efficiently and equitably.

22. The speed at which phase two of the Response Fund was established meant that some schools were uncertain about the funding and needed to clarify questions and iterate applications.
23. The uptake of phase two funding by schools was slower than expected due to factors including:
 - a. the recent support received through the bulk distribution of funds in phase one
 - b. a system-wide increase in the allocation of teacher aide support by an average additional three hours per week for each ORS-verified student
 - c. the timing of the school terms compared to the time needed for schools to plan for individual requirements, and
 - d. time needed for regional support and decision-making processes.
24. As a result, there was a significant increase in uptake of the Response Fund in the final months. While \$5.4 million in funds was distributed in the first five months, the last two months saw a total expenditure of \$4.9 million (of which \$3 million was distributed in June). Overall, this resulted in the underspend that was forecast in February 2021 (paragraph 6) being \$7.8 million rather than the \$8.8 million predicted.

Next steps and recommendations

25. Information provided by schools in the applications for phase two funding will be useful for us to understand student needs and innovative practices for providing support. We will continue to analyse the more than one thousand applications received and will share any further findings as well as feeding them into related workstreams.
26. Since the Response Fund provided additional teacher aide hours for students who are ORS-verified and already receiving teacher aide support, the Ministry is not requesting further reporting from recipients on the Fund's outcomes.
27. Future allocations of flexible funding for learning support will be informed by lessons learned through this process including:
 - a. the time and support schools need to enable greater tailoring of plans according to needs; and
 - b. where possible, greater flexibility for the types of assistance that can be funded to include supplementary specialist teacher time, PLD and other needs.

Proactive Release

28. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.
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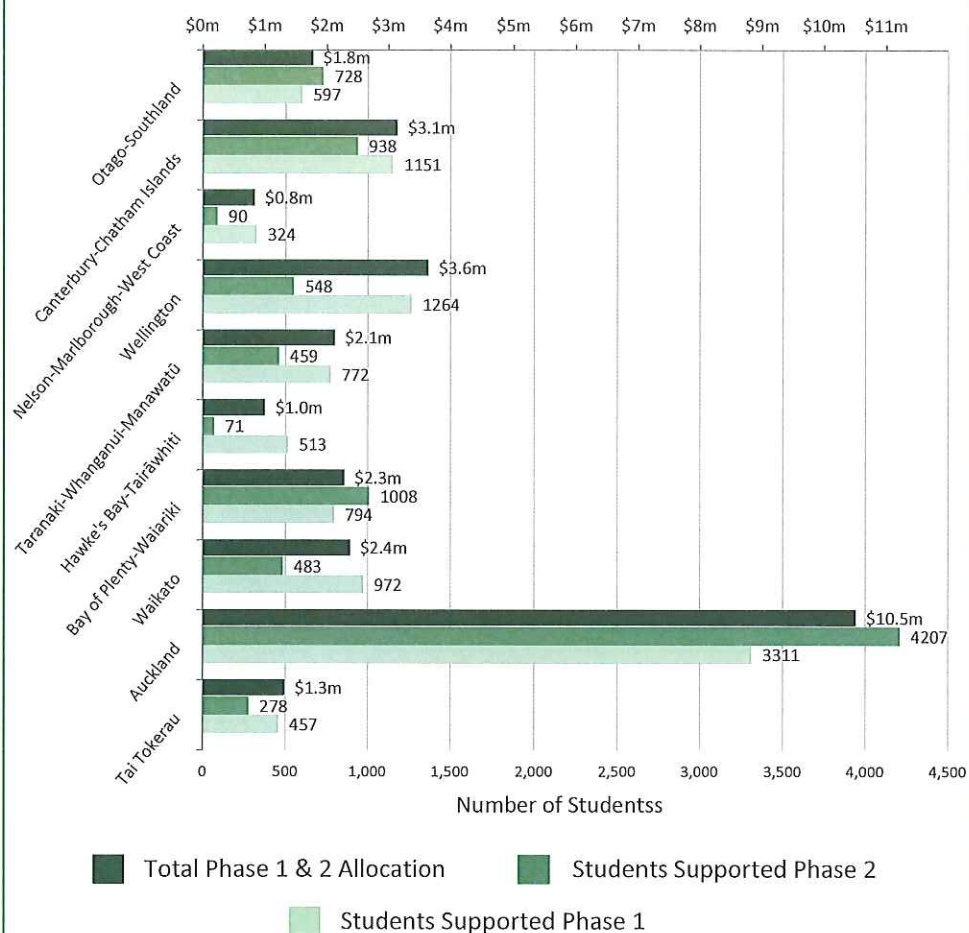
Annexes

Annex 1: National summary of ORS COVID-19 Response Fund (Phases one and two)

Proactively Released

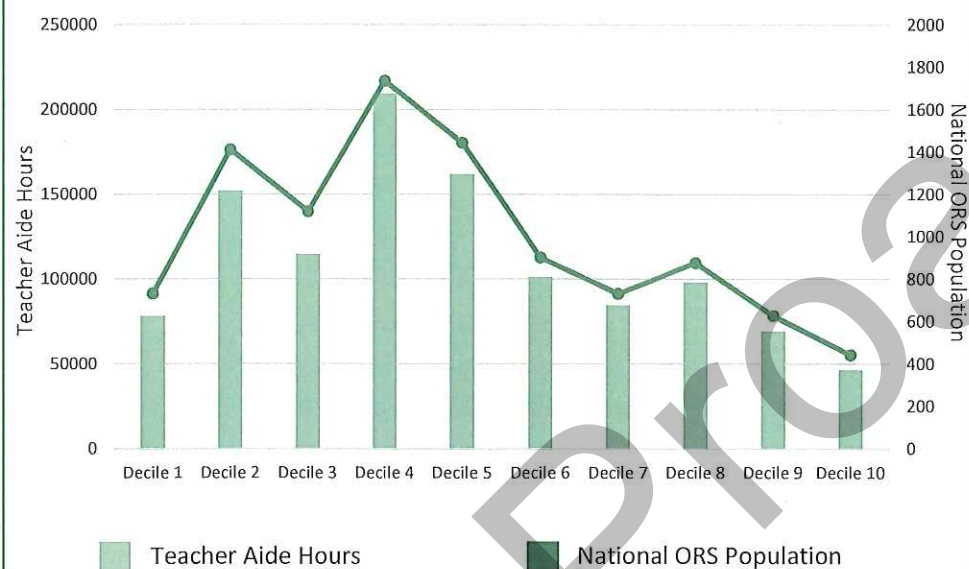
ONGOING RESOURCING SCHEME COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND – National summary of allocation

Total of \$28.9 million was allocated in Phase 1 and Phase 2 for ORS verified students



Only 3/10 regions allocated more funding in phase 2. Overall, the Response Fund efficiently delivered additional funding for all ORS students through phase 1 while providing funding to schools and students with the greatest need through phase 2.

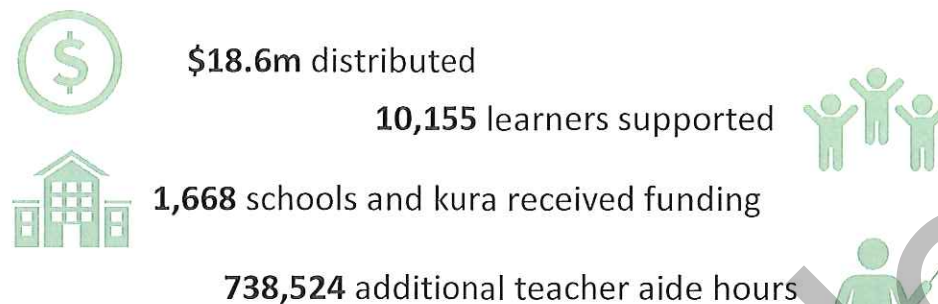
Allocation of teacher aide hours and distribution of ORS population by decile



The allocation of ORS COVID-19 Response Fund teacher aide hours is in line with the distribution of ORS students across deciles.

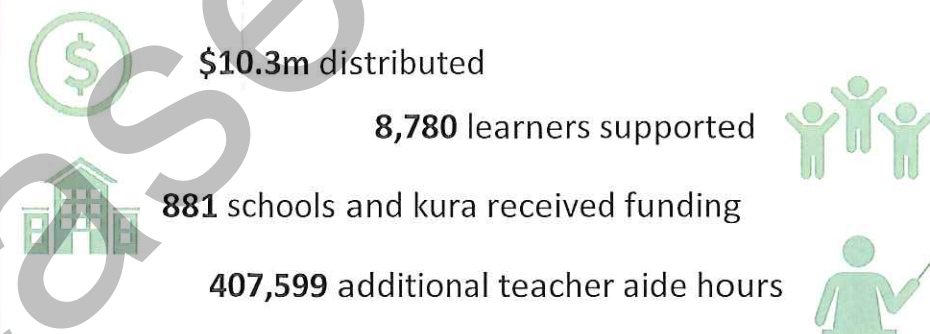
Response Fund Phase 1 Summary

Allocation for schools and kura was based on the total number of learners enrolled who are ORS verified. This equates to 69 hours per learner nationally.¹



Response Fund Phase 2 Summary

ORS COVID-19 Response Fund Phase 2 started on 16 November 2020.



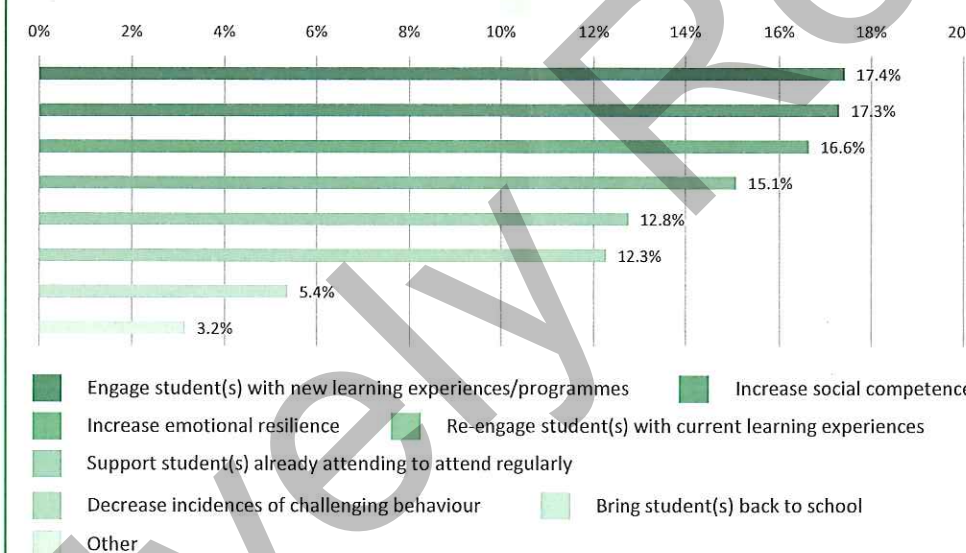
Primary and intermediate schools and kura received the bulk of funding²

- 6,812 learners supported across 672 schools and kura
- 841 approved plans valued at \$7.7m (74% of Funding)
- Average teacher aide hours of 45 per learner

Secondary schools and kura³

- 1,998 learners supported across 209 secondary schools and kura
- 292 approved plans valued at \$2.6m (26% of Funding)
- Average teacher aide hours of 52 per learner

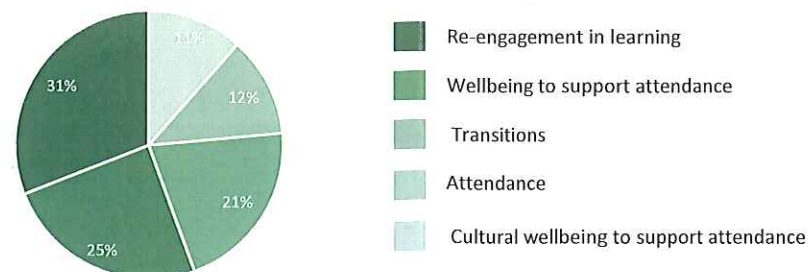
Response Fund Phase 2 Intended Outcomes



Many plans had multiple intended outcomes. A greater number of plans engaged students with new learning and enhanced social and emotional competence/resilience. Fewer plans addressed issues of attendance and challenging behaviour.

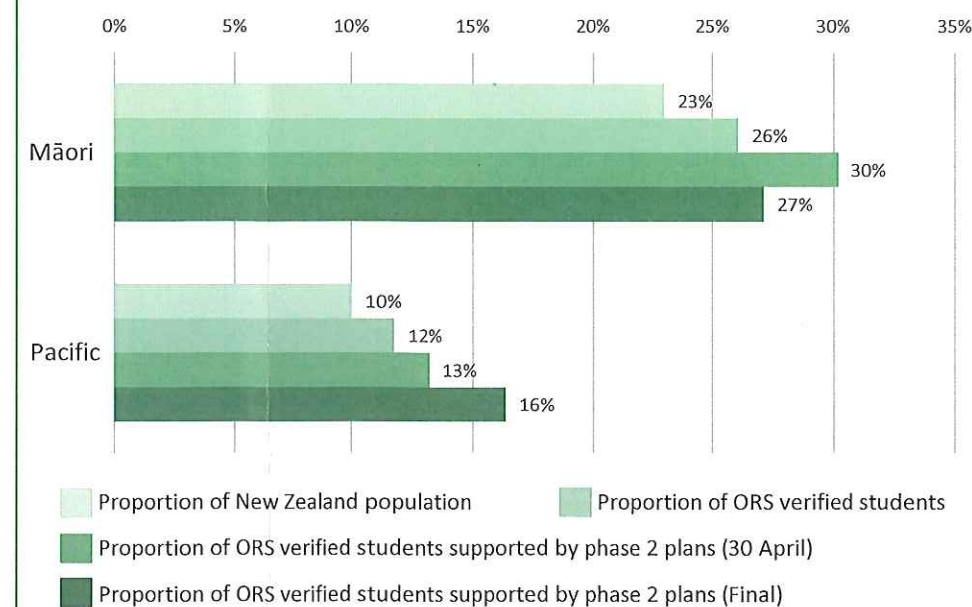
Support for needs related to re-engagement in learning makes up the largest proportion of plans submitted

Distribution of plans approved by category of need



Over time, there was no clear trend in the distribution of student needs with the exception of attendance, which showed a steady decline as the year progressed.

Response Fund support for Māori and Pacific students



Schools requested funding to provide additional support for Māori and Pacific students at rates greater than their representation among ORS verified students.

Notes:

- Auckland's allocation was increased due to a second lockdown. The allocation for non-fundholder schools and kura increased to 96 hours, and for fundholder schools and kura increased to 73 hours.
- Schools & kura includes 'Specialist' Schools.
- Secondary schools includes 'Composite Schools'