Education Report: Design of Student Wellbeing Measures

To: Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education

Cc: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education
    Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister for Māori Education
    Hon Aupito William Sio, Associate Minister for Education (Pacific Peoples)

Date: 30th June 2021

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Round Robin: No

Purpose of Report

This paper outlines for your agreement a proposed approach to designing student wellbeing measures and a mechanism for their use.

Summary

1. In *Shaping a stronger education system for all*, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) has committed to asking learners, ākonga and their family and whānau about student wellbeing more regularly. Using measures as part of this conversation supports common language and understanding of wellbeing and what it means in an education environment.

2. While schools, providers and the sector collect a lot of information about learners and ākonga, information about their wellbeing at school:
   - is not collected everywhere
   - when it is collected, is not collected consistently
   - is not collected in a way that students and ākonga, family and whānau, iwi or hapū and community groups who can support wellbeing can access the information
   - is not always collected in a way that helps inform education policy development or system level decisions.

3. This means learners and ākonga, family and whānau experiences and views of what supports their wellbeing at school are not influencing change as much as they should.

4. To support the increased understanding of wellbeing at school and more informed decision making, we recommend the creation of a set of common, reliable, valid and easy-to-use student wellbeing measures that are culturally appropriate and support te ao Māori concepts of wellbeing. The aim is that they will inform and empower schools, kura, providers and communities to improve learner and ākonga wellbeing. They could potentially be used at a system or sector-wide level in a de-identified way to help us understand progress towards the outcomes of Ka Hikitia, The Pacific Action Plan and the National Education Learning
Priorities and Tertiary Education Strategy. To enable the measures to be used, the design will look at what mechanism/s are needed for the collection, storage and use of the data and information.

5. We recommend we design with the sector, learners and ākonga, family and whānau. Working together will help build trust and ensure that the measures and mechanism are fit for purpose, culturally appropriate and meaningful to those they are for.

6. The Ministry’s Wellbeing and Equity Board has released funding until June 2022 for this project.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

a. agree that the Ministry begins a co-design process to create student wellbeing measures and a mechanism for using them;

b. agree the proposed parameters for the design of the measures (paragraph 29), in particular that the measures focus on student wellbeing in the education environment or the effects of the education environment on wellbeing;

c. agree that the primary goal of developing these measures is to support schools and communities to understand student wellbeing better and take action to improve it;

d. agree in principle to a secondary goal that the measures could be accessible to the Ministry in a way that does not identify individuals, to better understand student wellbeing at a system level. It is recommended that this possibility is considered as part of the co-design and that views are sought from participants about it;

e. note that this work is funded for initial development and design but does not have funding for implementation, which would require a budget bid for the 2022 Budget to progress it;

f. note that this report has been provided to Minister Davis and Minister Sio as the development of wellbeing measures have direct relevance for Māori ākonga and Pacific learners;

g. proactively release this report.

Alexander Brunt
Deputy Secretary
Evidence, Data and Knowledge

Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

30/6/2021
1/7/2021
Background

7. Many schools and providers are developing their own wellbeing concepts or ways to survey or measure it which indicates that many want to understand wellbeing better. More widely, as part of setting the National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) priorities and its alignment to the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, the Ministry has highlighted the importance of supporting improvement in student wellbeing. In *Shaping a stronger education system for all*, the Ministry committed to asking about student wellbeing regularly.

8. As noted during the recent Educational Evaluation strategy session which you attended, New Zealand has comparatively weak evidence and knowledge around student wellbeing and the causes of different wellbeing experiences. These knowledge gaps reduce the ability of schools, kura, and the wider sector to make informed decisions to improve wellbeing. These knowledge gaps are also a barrier to supporting Māori learners to enjoy and achieve success as Māori, with a strong sense of belonging and supports that are culturally appropriate, and to Pacific learners being equipped to achieve their education aspirations.

9. Using measures as part of this conversation supports a common language and understanding of wellbeing and what it means in an education environment. It means schools (and potentially the communities and wider system) can see more clearly if and how wellbeing changes over time, for whom and in what ways.

10. The NELP, the TES, the Action Plan for Pacific Education and Ka Hikitia all provide high-level frameworks for wellbeing in an education setting. In addition, across government there are multiple frameworks or approaches for measures of “wellbeing”, such as Treasury’s Living Standards Framework, Oranga Tamariki and the Independent Children’s Monitor also use an outcomes framework in relation to children and young people in state care that includes many aspects of wellbeing.

11. Beyond the conceptual level, there are existing approaches for measurement of “wellbeing”. For example, the Ministry for Social Development is undertaking a “WhatAboutMe?” survey to provide some data for monitoring the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. There are surveys that are administered through schools by researchers from various organisations and we know many schools and education providers are paying for some form of “wellbeing survey” or “wellbeing tool” to help them understand the wellbeing of their students (Annex 1 provides more detail of this landscape). While the Wellbeing@Schools toolkit administered by NZCER is freely available, only a minority of schools are currently using it.

12. Overall, the information about student wellbeing at school:
   - is not collected everywhere
   - when it is collected, is not collected consistently
   - is not collected in a way that students and ākonga, family and whānau, iwi or hapū and community groups who can support wellbeing can access the information
   - is not always collected in a way that helps inform education policy development or system level decisions.
There needs to be a better way to understand student wellbeing

13. We know from Kōrero Mātauranga/The Education Conversation that learner and ākonga wellbeing in schools, or the effects of their education experience on their wellbeing, are things that people want to do more about and want improved. There are many interventions, programmes and initiatives across New Zealand that aim to improve wellbeing in some way. Without standardised and consistently used measures, schools and kura cannot reliably see if the effort and investment they put in is having a positive impact. The same challenge exists at a sector and system level.

14. The Ministry’s Wellbeing and Equity Board approved funding until June 2022 for work to co-design measures that will fill this knowledge gap, initially at a school and community level. We recommend that we consider how measures could also fill the knowledge gap at the system level. We suggest we talk with people and get their views on this during a co-design process and explore with them what purposes and uses they believe are fair and appropriate to use the information for.

Measures are a specific way of learning about wellbeing

15. Measurement, or using measures, is a way of working out the size of something in a consistent way. In this context, measures could be a set of standard questions or scales that help turn the subjective and varied ideas and concepts around wellbeing into things that can be easily counted and observed across large groups of people. They allow more confident comparison of like with like between groups and over time. It means schools and communities (and potentially the wider system) can see more clearly if and how wellbeing changes over time, for whom and in what ways.

16. We do not yet know what the measures will be, or how they will look. There may need to be some flexibility in how they are presented so they work across a diverse range of situations. If that is the case, there will be underlying connections that ensure reliability.

Options for developing measures and anticipated outcomes

17. The Ministry could independently develop a new set of measures and a mechanism for using them relying solely on subject matter expertise in measurement design and psychometrics. The risk of this approach is that such measures will not address the needs across the sector because it will not be informed by the sector. People will feel the Ministry is defining wellbeing for them rather than with them. Our assessment is that the likely impact of this would be weaker measures, mistrust, and unwillingness to use them.

18. We recommend that we co-design student wellbeing measures and a mechanism/s for using them. While this approach will take more time and have a higher cost than independent development, we believe it will significantly increase the chance of creating useful and informative measures. By including the ideas, thoughts and views of students and ākonga, their family and whānau, their schools and others who can support their wellbeing, we are much more likely to build trust in a set of measures which are meaningful. By asking to partner with Māori in this important conversation, we recognise their role in deciding what matters for ākonga.

19. Given the wide range of wellbeing related frameworks that are already in use, we advise we align and map the measures to the NELP/ITES and Child and Youth Wellbeing
Strategy, rather than develop a new “standalone” framework. We believe creating an additional “framework” risks causing confusion and duplication.

20. We recommend that the primary goal of the project would be that the measures are created to inform direct actions that improve student wellbeing at school, kura and Kāhui Ako level and throughout communities.

21. With your agreement, and with support from learners and ākonga, families and whānau and schools, we propose a secondary goal would be that the measures can be accessible to the Ministry in a way that does not identify individuals, to be used at a system level. This would support the Ministry to better understand the aggregate picture of student wellbeing and support more informed analysis and decision making at the system level.

22. We propose that the initial co-design involves students in Year 7 and above. Engaging with younger children requires specialised approaches and skills which are beyond the capacity of the project in this initial stage. Later development work on the measures will include the ability to adapt them down the year levels, including into early literacy.

23. In terms of deliverables, we propose this work creates:
   - a set of common, reliable, valid and easy-to-use student wellbeing measures that are culturally appropriate and support te ao Māori concepts of wellbeing
   - a proposed mechanism/s for collecting, storing and use of the measures
   - a recommended plan for the safe and respectful protection and use of the data and information that comes from the measures over time.

24. It is important to note that, while these are the proposed outputs of the work, the exact nature of the measures, or what a mechanism should look like, is not pre-determined. It is possible that the most appropriate outcome long term will be to adjust a current set of measures in line with what is developed. A new standalone mechanism may not be required – rather it may be more suitable to leverage off something that is already in place.

25. We believe the anticipated outcomes of having co-designed common measures, a collection mechanism/s, and a clear plan for safe use of the information are:
   - a high level of trust and buy-in to a common way to measure student wellbeing, which will support school-to-school and community-to-community learning about ways to support student wellbeing
   - a clearer understanding of wellbeing amongst learners and ākonga, their family and whānau, education providers, community, hapū and iwi
   - an input into more evidence-based decision making in schools, kura, providers, Kāhui Ako and communities
   - if the measures are aggregated at a system level and their use is widespread and consistent, then the wider education sector:
     - will have a clearer and more reliable view of student wellbeing for different groups, and how it changes over time
     - can use the information to make more informed decisions that improve learner’s wellbeing, and to see if supports or interventions have the positive effect on wellbeing they planned.
26. Depending on the outcomes of the design work, a budget bid may be required to build and implement the measures and mechanisms at scale, in a way that is freely available and easy to use, during a second phase of work.

The measures need to be useful and support meaningful action

27. The measures themselves will not create change. Rather change happens when the knowledge they create is used to support meaningful action. Therefore, we need to ensure that the measures are created to be as useful as possible in an education and learning context.

28. We believe setting clear parameters for the measures will help make sure they are useful and meaningful. Parameters would not pre-determine what the measures will be but would set some minimum requirements for what they should do. Having parameters will help an effective co-design process and help communicate the purpose of the measures. We believe the measures need to be robust, valid and enable reliable comparison over time and between different groups, while also being pragmatic, easy to use, quick and engaging. They also need to be culturally meaningful.

29. The table below outlines suggested parameters of the measures and why each parameter is necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed parameters</th>
<th>Why these matters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on student wellbeing in the learning environment or the effects of the learning environment on wellbeing.</td>
<td>These measures may incorporate aspects of wellbeing that are not directly within the education sector's ability to influence. However, the main focus needs to be on their ability to generate insights that informs actions and positive changes schools, education providers and the wider sector can make.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primarily focus on supporting schools, providers and communities to understand student wellbeing through a common lens. Any potential use of the measures at a system level is a secondary focus.</td>
<td>While having reliable standardised measures that can be analysed and inform sector-wide policy development would have many benefits, the most important step right now is to ensure that schools and communities have what they need freely available.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use language and concepts that engage students, their family's and whānau. This includes the ability to be used by those of different literacy levels and those with additional learning needs.</td>
<td>Accurate and useful information relies on the willingness of people to share information about their wellbeing and to understand what is being asked of them and feel that it reflects who they are and what matters to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be culturally and identity responsive with a specific focus on incorporating te ao Māori concepts of wellbeing in whatever is useful and meaningful.</td>
<td>Culture and identity are key components of wellbeing and need to be considered in terms of how responsive and inclusive a learning environment can be. To support Māori success as Māori, we need to support Māori ways of understanding and describing wellbeing.</td>
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<td>Inform practical actions</td>
<td>Measuring wellbeing does not improve it, rather the actions taken from the results of measurement create change.</td>
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<td>Be adaptable across age ranges (initially Years 7 and above)</td>
<td>Whilst wellbeing matters across all ages, the supports and interventions needed across age groups might be different and we may discover that the measures need to be as well. As noted, engaging with younger children requires specialised approaches and skills which are beyond the capacity of the project in this initial stage.</td>
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30. Alternatively, we could set no or fewer parameters for the measures. The risk of this is that there could be confusion about their purpose and what is expected of the co-design process. We believe the limited set of parameters above strikes the right balance.

**We recommend a co-design approach to enable the success of the measures**

31. People need to trust the measures before they will be willing to use them or support community or system level use of the data that comes from them. A co-design process can build this trust. Working openly and transparently with people, listening to their ideas and thoughts and incorporating those into the design will increase the usefulness of the measures. It will help ensure they connect with those who need to use them.

32. We suggest a co-design process that involves a wide range of people:
   - Māori ākonga and their whānau, hapū and iwi
   - A range of learners with particular focus on hearing from those with additional learning needs, Rainbow youth, Pacific learners
   - schools and education providers, including Māori medium and Kura Kaupapa
   - family and caregivers
   - community groups who support student wellbeing
   - stakeholders who may use the information (for example policy makers, researchers, service providers).

33. We will incorporate Kaupapa Māori co-design by working with experts in this area. The diagram below outlines what a good co-design approach can look like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diverse and varied engagement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hear the views and ideas of a wide range of people, schools and communities in different places across New Zealand. We will engage through a Kaupapa Māori co-design lens with Māori ākonga and their whānau to ensure their voices are heard strongly.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on tangible, practical design</th>
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<tr>
<td>There has already been a lot of discussion about wellbeing as a concept. Our sessions will focus on taking concepts and turning them into tangible statements, questions and language that will become practical measures and concrete ideas for mechanisms.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Build a team of connectors and collaborators</th>
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<tr>
<td>We will work with connectors who have established relationships or are already working on related issues, to help us reach people and facilitate sessions on our behalf.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We will build a team of collaborators who support the work and have facilitation and co-design experience to facilitate sessions. This means we can reach more people quicker.</td>
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<td>We will prioritise including young people as connectors and virtual team members in any way possible.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Consistent but flexible sessions</th>
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<td>The sessions need to deliver the practical, tangible outcomes we need to create measures and mechanisms, so there needs to be a level of consistency in what is covered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>However, it’s important that sessions and respond to the needs and preferences of those attending them (for example in length, in approach, place, cultural preferences).</td>
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<tr>
<td>To achieve this, we will build a co-design kit for facilitators to use and adapt but still make sure we get the outputs we need.</td>
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Potential system level use of the measures

34. As noted, we propose a secondary goal for the measures of system level use of de-identified information. We believe that the common use of a set of measures both between schools and kura and between schools and kura and the Ministry would be a significant step forward in a collective approach to improving student wellbeing.

35. For example, the Ministry is working on the development of the learning and performance framework for NELP and TES including implementation reporting, research and evaluation requirements and outcomes for learners and ākonga, family and whānau. The framework will be used to select indicators and measures and identify gaps in current and proposed data collections which will allow us to see progress in line with NELP and TES. This work is a natural place for system level use of the student wellbeing measures.

36. To uphold and respect the co-design approach, it is important that we do not pre-determine what the measures will include or how they need to look. As such, we will not set out to require them to be direct inputs into the NELP and TES performance framework. However, we will include such potential uses in our co-design conversations. We will develop the measures with the context of system information and learning needs in mind and stay connected to the development of the NELP and TES framework throughout the development of the measures.

Risks

37. There is a risk that there will be insufficient uptake of the measures to meet either our primary or secondary goals. This would mean that the identified problem of inconsistent information that is not accessible to everyone who needs it will not be addressed. We believe a genuine co-design process will minimise this risk.

38. There is a risk that this work is seen as undermining the existing Wellbeing@Schools tool provided by NZCER under contract to the Ministry. However, there is no pre-determined decision around the on-going role of Wellbeing@Schools. The mitigation for this risk is clear communication, including addressing this issue up front. We will also keep NZCER up to date with the progress of the work and invite them to join our advisory group.

Financial Implications

39. This project has funding through until June 2022 for the initial design and development. However, implementation of the measures may have financial implications depending on the nature of the mechanism for using the measures, the amount of change and sector development required. We will further scope these costs once we know more
from the co-design. We anticipate that a budget bid will be required to fund the implementation.

Next steps

40. Should you agree to the suggested approach for this work, we will begin to engage with the sector and arrange the co-design process. We anticipate the first round of co-design will be completed by the end of August, with a second "check back" round complete by end of November (Annex 2 provides more detail on projected milestones).

41. We will update you by the end of August on progress and initial learnings from the co-design.
Annexes

Annex 1: Student wellbeing data and information collections snapshot
Annex 2: Student wellbeing measures – timeline and key milestones
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<tr>
<th>Course</th>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>N/ZCER</td>
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**Student Wellbeing data and Information collection snapshot**
Proactively Released