

Education Report: Options for a Wellbeing Package to respond to COVID-19

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	15 April 2020	Priority:	High
Security Level:	Budget sensitive	METIS No:	1225662
Drafter:	Beth Charlton	DDI:	s 9(2)(a)
Key Contact:	Damian Edwards	DDI:	
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

- **note** that the Ministry of Education has prepared options for a Wellbeing Package to respond to the social impacts of COVID-19 and the public health response.
- **agree** to the Ministry of Education seeking additional funding from the COVID-19 notional fund for Wellbeing initiatives.
- **indicate** which of the proposals should be progressed for template submission to the Treasury, to be considered for funding from the COVID-19 notional fund.

Summary

- 1 On 25 March 2020, New Zealand moved into Level 4 of the COVID-19 Alert framework, with a widespread shutdown of the non-essential industries and services for a minimum of 4 weeks. This included the physical closure of education providers and a transition to online or distance learning, as well as a lockdown on households.
- 2 There is evidence from Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally about the negative social impacts of disasters and emergencies, and emerging evidence from the current pandemic responses worldwide reinforces the expectation of significant social and economic disruption and risks to the wellbeing of young people and whānau.
- 3 The Ministry has prepared options for a Wellbeing Package, focussed on ensuring basic needs are met and providing targeted support for those most at risk from disproportionate impact over the next 18 months. A summary view of the options and supplementary information is at **Annex 1**. Additional information regarding capital expenses is at **Annex 2**.
- 4 Funding for initiatives will be sought from a notional fund established specifically to manage COVID-19 related expenditure.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- note** that the Ministry of Education has prepared options for a Wellbeing package to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 **Noted**
- agree** to the Ministry of Education seeking additional funding through the COVID-19 notional fund for wellbeing initiatives to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 **Agree / Disagree**
- discuss** this report with the Associate Ministers of Education
- indicate** in the table below which of the proposals under each priority area should be progressed for template submission to the Treasury:

Priority area	Proposals	Agree/ disagree
1. Mitigating the impacts of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage	1a. Free and Healthy School Lunches pilot – s 9(2)(g)(i)	
2. Supporting wellbeing and responding to mental health issues	2a. Collective local responses to youth mental health and wellbeing	
	2b. Embedding quality teaching approaches to mental health, wellbeing and healthy relationships in schools, kura and early learning services	
	2c. Increasing access to workplace assistance and counselling for school and kura employees	
	2d. Pilot of guidance counsellors in primary schools	
	2e. Increase to guidance staffing entitlement for secondary schools	
	2f. Flexible wellbeing fund for early childhood education (ECE), schools and kura	
3	s 9(2)(f)(iv)	
4. Supporting Māori learners and whānau	4a. Engaging Iwi and Māori organisations to provide facilitation and brokerage services.	
5. Supporting Pacific learners and whānau	5a. Translation and distribution of important information relating to COVID-19 and impact on schools and learning	
	s 9(2)(f)(iv)	
	5e. Support for governance and management of Pacific ECE services during anticipated recession	
6.	s 9(2)(f)(iv)	

5. **do not release** this report at this time as it relates to decisions yet to be made by Cabinet and contains Budget sensitive information. **Release/Not release**



Damian Edwards
**Associated Deputy Secretary
Education System Policy**

15/04/2020

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education



Background

- 1 On 31 December 2019, China reported cases of COVID-19 to the World Health Organisation (WHO). On 30 January 2020, WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and, on 11 March, a pandemic was declared. On 25 March, a State of National Emergency was declared across New Zealand to slow the spread of COVID-19 and the Government raised the COVID-19 Alert to Level 4, including a minimum 4 week lockdown period.
- 2 To provide flexibility around funding COVID-19 related expenses the Government is managing the response and recovery costs outside of the usual Budget allowance framework. The Government has established a notional fund to manage COVID-19 related expenditure. Any funding that is sought from the notional fund in relation to COVID-19 expenses will need to meet certain criteria, including that funding is needed as a direct result of COVID-19 and cannot be managed from within baselines.

Emergencies and disasters drive increases in risks to families and negative social outcomes

- 3 There is a substantial body of evidence from previous emergencies in Aotearoa New Zealand (such as following the 2010-11 Christchurch Earthquakes) and internationally, as well as an increasing number of reports from the current pandemic, that negative social outcomes increase during and following emergencies and disasters.
- 4 In Christchurch, following the 2010-11 Earthquakes there was an immediate increase in reports of family violence. Police recorded a 53 per cent increase in family violence in the year after the Earthquakes. Already, during the current lockdown period, a 20 per cent increase in family violence incidents had been reported in the Canterbury region, with a 36 per cent increase in the number of incidents experienced by children.¹
- 5 Ministry of Education officials in the Canterbury region reported significant decreases in social capital in the aftermath of the Earthquakes, particularly in communities already experiencing significant deprivation. This manifested with mistrust of government services, reluctance or inability to access essential government services and healthcare. In East Christchurch, an area that suffered extensive damage during the Earthquakes, compounded by already high levels of deprivation, the rate of child protection notifications requiring further action was 178 per cent of the national rate.² The number of young people referred to specialist mental health services increased substantially, and more young people began displaying adult mental health issues.³
- 6 Around the world, lockdown conditions during the current pandemic have incurred substantial increases in reports of violence and abuse.⁴ A recently released Canadian review of the literature⁵ on child welfare during pandemics identified a number of increased risks to children, including:

¹ Reported in <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/120878394/coronavirus-nearly-one-incident-of-family-harm-in-canterbury-every-half-hour>

² Regenerate Christchurch (2017). Community needs profile for East Christchurch: Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor Regeneration Plan, <https://engage.regeneratechristchurch.nz/25752/documents/55619>

³ Child Poverty Action Group (2014), *Children and the Canterbury Earthquakes*, <https://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/Backgrounders/140227%20CPAG%20Children%20and%20the%20Canterbury%20Feb2014.pdf>

⁴ Reported at <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

⁵ Sistovaris et al (2020), 'Child welfare and pandemics: literature scan', Policy Bench, Fraser Mustard Institute of Human Development, University of Toronto
<https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Child%20Welfare%20and%20Pandemi...>

- a. Decreased in-home support services reduces chances to detect and respond to health and care issues
- b. Increased violence and abuse
- c. Mental distress due to social isolation, fear and panic
- d. Inaccessibility of basic services for vulnerable families
- e. Social and racial discrimination of individuals or groups suspected to be infected.

Supporting protective factors and mitigating risk are critical to the wellbeing of young people during and after the lockdown period

- 7 To support the wellbeing of children, young people and their whānau, it is critical to promote individual, family and community protective factors, and mitigate risk factors⁶. While the experience of 'social disruption' from the public health response to COVID-19 will be near universal, how young people and families respond to and cope with its effects will vary, depending on how the risk and protective factors stack up.
- 8 Without additional wellbeing support, there is a significant risk to the social outcomes and wellbeing of many communities. Māori, Pacific and socioeconomically disadvantaged families and communities are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the economic and social consequences of the public health response. Evidence shows that those who were most vulnerable prior to a disaster generally remain the most vulnerable in the aftermath.⁷

We need to deliberately respond to the social challenges posed by COVID-19, with a focus on ensuring basic needs are met

- 9 To respond to the potential negative social outcomes directly resulting from the pandemic and lockdown, additional funding is being sought from the notional fund for wellbeing initiatives that will mitigate these impacts in the short term and support communities' resilience to adapt to new ways of living and working over the next 18 months.

Proposed options for a Wellbeing Package

- 10 The Ministry has developed options for a COVID-19 Wellbeing Package. The package aims to address the most critical barriers to wellbeing across six priority areas:
 1. Mitigating the impacts of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage
 2. Supporting wellbeing and responding to mental health issues
 3. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
 4. Supporting Māori Learners and whānau
 5. Supporting Pacific learners and whānau
 6. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
- 11 The proposals within each priority area focus on ensuring basic needs are met and providing targeted support for those most at risk over the next 18 months. The table in Annex 1 provides a summary view of the proposals across the priority areas, and, while we consider all of these proposals to be high priority, indicates those that we believe are critical to the wellbeing of young people and likely to have the most

⁶ Protective factors are the conditions or attributes that support individuals, families and communities to respond more effectively to stressful experiences – they support succeeding 'against the odds'. They are particularly critical for child and youth wellbeing and development. Risk factors are the conditions or attributes that are associated with a higher likelihood of poor outcomes.

⁷ Morrow B. H. (1999), 'Identifying and Mapping Community Vulnerability', *Disasters* 1999 23(1) 1-18

substantial impact. Additional information regarding capital costs for certain bids is at Annex 2.

- 12 Each priority area includes proposals to respond to both the immediate and medium-term impacts of COVID-19. For this purpose, we have defined 'immediate' as the remainder of 2020 (given the probable continuation of physical distancing and other public health approaches that impact on the education system), and 'medium-term' as 2021.
- 13 We expect to develop options to mitigate long-term effects of COVID-19 through Budget 2021, once the full situation becomes clearer.

Priority 1: Mitigating the impacts of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage

- 14 The current and expected impacts of the COVID-19 public health response are likely to see increases in material deprivation and unemployment. This will worsen situations for those already struggling, and will likely impact whānau and communities that have not previously experienced substantial deprivation. We need to cushion the impact on young people and whānau by working collectively to ensure their basic needs are being met.

1a. Free and Healthy School Lunch Programme

- 15 Given the expected significant increase in unemployment and financial stress across many communities in Aotearoa New Zealand over the next 18-plus months, s 9(2)(g)(i)
- s 9(2)(g)(i)

16

17

Priority 2: Supporting mental wellbeing and responding to mental health issues

- 18 Supporting wellbeing and responding to mental health issues will become more urgent in the recovery period. We know that families already face a number of risks to their wellbeing, and for many these will be amplified or compounded by social, economic and emotional impacts of the current pandemic. We also know there are a range of basic needs and services that many families will find difficult to access, potentially manifesting in further mental health issues if left unaddressed. It is important to take a collective, coordinated approach to meeting the wellbeing needs of young people and their whānau to prevent escalation, while responding appropriately to mental health issues.
- 19 There is currently a wide range of work being done by the Ministry of Education to support learners' mental wellbeing during COVID-19. This includes the new Learning From Home website, which contains information for teachers, parents and whānau on how to support children's wellbeing during COVID-19, with further resources to be developed. The two new education television channels, launched on April 15 2020, will screen wellbeing content for young people and advice for parents.

20 However, a coordinated cross-sector approach to support the ongoing wellbeing and mental health of young people is needed to respond to the range of issues and challenges young people and whānau will face in a post-COVID-19 environment. While there will be an increase in mental health issues that require a specialised approach, the increase in lower-level wellbeing challenges that have the potential to manifest into mental health problems will need to be responded to appropriately. This may be through social work, mentoring, learning support, healthcare, or another approach as the need requires. This will ensure access to mental health support is prioritised to mental health problems, rather than issues that can be prevented from becoming mental health problems through other approaches.

21 Ensuring teachers are well-supported is also critical. Teaching is a challenging profession and on a normal day teachers face barriers to their wellbeing, just as the young people they are responsible for do. Teachers will be grappling with the substantial upheaval in delivering education, the impacts of the pandemic on their classes, and also as members of their own whānau and community reacting to the pandemic. It is essential to a strong, high-quality workforce, as well as to the engagement and wellbeing of the learners in their class, to ensure their wellbeing needs are being met.

2a. Collective local responses to youth mental health and wellbeing (\$TBC)

22 A collaborative, co-ordinated approach from across the social sector will be essential to responding to the broad range of issues faced by many young people and their whānau during the nationwide recovery from the pandemic's wide-reaching impacts. Many lessons have been learnt from previous experiences, particularly in the aftermath of the Christchurch Earthquakes.

23 There is a substantial body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of collaborative and collective impact approaches to wellbeing and mental health. In particular, effectiveness is dependent on proper implementation, commitment from all stakeholders and culturally sustaining practice. This proposal would in particular seek to ensure a fit-for-purpose approach to wellbeing and mental health support for those who traditionally have lower rates of access and successful intervention: Māori, Pacific and socioeconomically disadvantaged young people and whānau.

24 The proposal requires substantial cross-agency collaboration across the social sector agencies and with the social sector itself. We believe securing a contingency for implementation, to be held while we undertake the necessary policy and design work, including options for targeting, would be the most appropriate way forward. This would ensure we are able to roll-out an approach that has buy-in across central government and regionally, and provide tailored responses based on school, community and whānau need. Further work and consultation will need to be carried out across the sector to determine the design and function of this model and the amount needed to implement it

2b. Embedding quality teaching approaches to mental health, wellbeing and healthy relationships in schools, kura and early learning services (\$32.754m over four years)

25 The Ministry proposes the inclusion of s 9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED] which has been reshaped to respond to the COVID-19 context. Regionally based Curriculum Leads will work directly with schools, kura and early learning services to implement high quality curriculum programmes relating to mental health, healthy relationships, wellbeing and safety.

- 26 The Curriculum Leads would manage the implementation of Ministry-commissioned Healthy Relationships Guidelines in schools and kura, and Mental Health and Wellbeing Guidelines in schools, kura and early learning services. This universal prevention approach would support long-term gains and the adoption of positive whole-school cultures relating to mental health, wellbeing and healthy relationships, while also supporting education providers to respond to new and increased wellbeing needs. The Curriculum Leads approach has the support of the ten Joint Venture agencies.

2c. Increasing access to workplace assistance and counselling for school and kura employees (\$15.987m over 3 years)

- 27 The impact of valuing wellbeing in workplaces is well evidenced, particularly in social service workplaces and in sectors working with young people. Currently, access to workplace assistance services are provided at the discretion of the school board, leaving gaps in the provision of this support to the education workforce. This proposal intends to fill these gaps, and will increase access to wellbeing support services for an additional 6,500 school employees in 2020/21, increasing to 10,000 in 2021/22.

2d. Pilot of guidance counsellors in primary schools s 9(2)(f)(iv) over four years)

- 28 This proposal would pilot the use of guidance counselling in primary schools, using the Cambridge Lifeskills framework. This service consists of one Clinical Leader and seven trained part-time counsellors. Children can be referred by the school, or by self-referral, and those who present complex or high mental health needs are referred to external services to ensure they receive the appropriate support. This pilot would set up 3 sites each in 3 different regions impacted by COVID-19 with high levels of deprivation and limited existing supports. If the evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the approach, there is potential to expand to other regions in the long-term.

2e. Increase to guidance staffing entitlement for secondary schools (s 9(2)(f)(iv) over four years)

- 29 An increase to the guidance staffing entitlement would be targeted to schools with over 200 secondary students, as they are disadvantaged by the current guidance staffing formula. Currently, these schools receive up to 2.3 FTE to employ staff for careers guidance, guidance counselling and pastoral care. Around 320 schools would receive an increase of up to 0.5 FTE to meet an expected increase in demand for counselling services and pastoral care as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We could explore changes to the way that guidance counsellors are funded in secondary schools to remove the requirement that they be registered teachers, but this is likely to be a longer-term piece of work.

2f. Flexible wellbeing fund for early childhood education (ECE), schools and kura s 9(2)(f)(iv) or one year)

- 30 A non-departmental fund to facilitate schools to get the support they need, either expertise, advice, or whole-of-school programmes. The fund would commence with the reopening of schools and ECEs. The expertise may be provided by DHB/PHO or educational sector expertise (for example, Special Educational Needs Coordinator/SENCOs or child psychologists). The programmes could include resilience programmes, or others which help schools notice, connect with and support children with wellbeing needs. Funding would be held centrally and allocated to regional offices for schools once an application process assessed against certain criteria has been completed, prioritised to regions worst-affected by COVID-19.

Priority 3 s 9(2)(f)(iv)

31

s 9(2)(f)(iv)

32

33

3a

34

35

3c.

36

3d.

37

38

39

Priority 4: Supporting Māori learners and whānau

40 In addition to ongoing education services, it is proposed to provide various wellbeing services through local education services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be critical for Māori learners and whānau as local-level intelligence is already signalling increases in food insecurity, unemployment and financial stress in some Māori communities.

41 There is significant evidence that many whānau and Māori communities with high needs are disengaged from local education services and lack trust. Conversely, local education services report limited capability and confidence to engage Māori whānau and communities. There is also evidence that Māori are less likely than other New Zealanders to access wellbeing services and entitlements directly from government agencies.

4a. Engaging Iwi and Māori Organisations to provide facilitation and brokerage services s 9(2)(f)(iv) over 4 years¹⁰

42 We propose third-party facilitation and brokerage services to ensure Māori learners and whānau can access education and wellbeing services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Iwi and Māori organisations are well-placed in many communities but they sometimes lack the capacity to undertake these functions.

43 This initiative will engage Iwi and Māori Organisations to provide facilitation and brokerage services between Māori learners and whānau and local education services. The approach will be implemented nationally with a particular focus on Māori communities with high needs. This will ensure that learners and whānau access the full range of education and wellbeing services being provided by local education services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority 5: Supporting Pacific learners and whānau

44 The immediate impacts of COVID-19 and the expected economic downturn are expected to significantly impact on the wellbeing of Pacific learners' and families.

¹⁰ This initiative may be rolled into the Māori Education package Minister Davis is currently developing.

Evidence from the 2008 Global Financial Crisis indicates that Pacific communities disproportionately suffered economic stresses¹¹, and insights from the Ministry for Pacific People's (MPP) indicate that some Pacific communities are already experiencing increased financial hardship due to COVID-19¹².

- 45 These economic stresses impact on the material and wellbeing needs of Pacific learners being met, both through increased economic hardship and a lack of culturally sustaining supports, and are likely to further exacerbate barriers to accessing education and further embed educational inequities. If the specific material and wellbeing needs of different Pacific learners aren't met in culturally relevant and targeted ways, Pacific learners are not in a position to regularly attend, engage and succeed in education. In this crisis, equity must be the priority.
- 46 Overall, the negative social and economic effects of the COVID-19 public health response are expected to disproportionately impact Pacific communities. Additional support is needed to respond to the impacts on Pacific learners' and families' ability to participate fully in education. These following proposals respond to the currently identified needs of Pacific learners and support responsive approaches to the specific needs of different Pacific communities as they arise.

5a. Translation and distribution of important information relating to COVID-19 and impact on schools and learning (\$1.500m over 2 years)

- 47 This initiative provides funding for translation of essential materials into 10 Pacific languages from June 2020 – June 2021. It also covers the printing and distribution of hard copies of essential materials to families awaiting internet connection and/or devices in the short term. In the medium term, translated materials will continue the provision of accessible information for Pacific families regarding education in the COVID-19 context.
- 48 MPP's community insights show that Pacific communities are struggling to access information about COVID-19 and the supports available to them. Our own community feedback also suggests that this is often true of information relating to education. Access to official information in an appropriate language is particularly critical during this time.

5b. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

49

50

¹¹ Radio NZ. 2014. NZ Pasifika Communities struggle. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/pacific/244882/nz-pasifika-communities-struggle>; Salvation Army. 2013. She'll be right- State of the Nation report from the Salvation Army. <https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/article/she'll-be-right>.

¹² Ministry of Pacific Peoples. 2020. Weekly community insights. Internal document

51 5c. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

52

53

54 5d.

55

56 **5e. Support for governance and management of Pacific ECE services during anticipated recession (7.600m over 4 years)**

56 This initiative provides funding for specialist advisors, Professional Learning and Development and other guidance and support for Pacific ECE services during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. This will also provide funding to establish networks of support between providers, where relevant. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Pacific services were already closing at a higher rate than other providers,¹³ and feedback and research has identified the need for more specialist support for centres to ensure they are effective in providing quality, culturally responsive early childhood education for Pacific learners.

57 s 9(2)(f)(iv)

¹³ In 2017/18 eight Pacific centres closed, which was 9.6% of closed services (and 28% of closed education and care services) even though they constitute 2.3% of total services (and 4% of education and care services). Another two centres had their licences suspended at December 2018. Only one new Pacific centre opened in 2017/18.

Priority 6: s 9(2)(f)(iv)

58

6a.

59

6b

60

6c

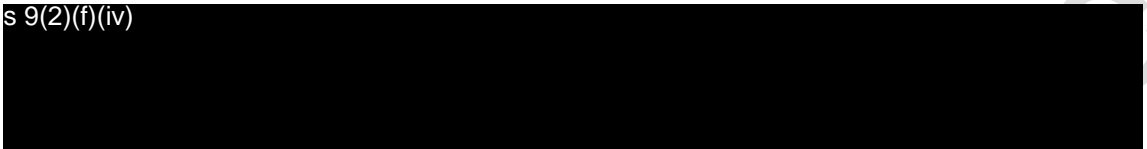
61

6d.

62

Next steps

- 63 The Ministry of Education is due to submit templates to Treasury for initiatives to be progressed on 24 April. Templates submitted will be based on your indications, as per recommendation 4 above. These will be submitted for your approval the week of 20 April, prior to sending to the Treasury.
- 64 A Cabinet meeting to consider packages and initiatives for funding from the COVID-19 notional fund is scheduled for Monday 11 May 2020.
- 65 s 9(2)(f)(iv)



Annex 1: Summary view of options to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 and support the wellbeing of young people and their whānau

Priority area	Proposals	Immediate 2020	Medium- term: 2021	Critical priority	Operating \$m				Comment
					20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24 & out years	
1. Mitigating the impacts of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage	1a. Free and Healthy School Lunches pilot – s 9(2)(g)(i)	✓	✓	✓	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	s 9(2)(g)(i)
2. Supporting wellbeing and responding to mental health issues	2a. Collective local responses to youth mental health and wellbeing		✓	✓	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	Requires cross-agency collaboration. Further work and consultation will be carried out across the sector to determine the design and function of this approach and the amount needed to implement it
	2b. Embedding quality teaching approaches to mental health, wellbeing and healthy relationships in schools, kura and early learning services			✓	5.154	9.142	9.229	9.229	A version was previously submitted as B20 New Spending initiative. Now reshaped to support COVID-19 response.
	2c. Increasing access to workplace assistance and counselling for school and kura employees	✓	✓	✓	s 9(2)(f)(iv)				
	2d. Pilot of guidance counsellors in primary schools		✓						Coalition agreement. Previously submitted as B20 New Spending initiative, repurposed to support COVID-19 response.
	2e. Increase to guidance staffing entitlement for secondary schools		✓	✓					
	2f. Flexible wellbeing fund for early childhood education (ECE), schools and kura		✓	✓	48.000	-	-	-	
	s 9(2)(f)(iv)								
4. Supporting Māori learners and whānau	4a. Engaging Iwi and Māori organisations to provide facilitation and brokerage services.	✓	✓	✓	29.00	29.00	29.00	29.00	Speech from the Throne. Previously submitted as B20 New Spending initiative, repurposed to support COVID-19 response.
5. Supporting Pacific learners and whānau	5a. Translation and distribution of important information relating to COVID-19 and impact on schools and learning	✓	✓	✓	1.000	0.500	-	-	
	5b. s 9(2)(f)(iv)								
	5e. Support for governance and management of Pacific ECE services during anticipated recession		✓	✓	1.000	2.000	2.200	2.400	Previously submitted as B20 New Spending initiative, repurposed to support COVID-19 response.
6. s 9(2)(f)(iv)									

									Spending initiative, repurposed to support COVID-19 response.
	s 9(2)(f)(iv)								

Proactively Re

Annex 2: Additional information for proposals with capital expenses

6c. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

