



Education Report: Updating the Action Plan for Pacific Education in the context of COVID-19

To:	Hon Jenny Salesa, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	21/04/2020	Priority:	Medium
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Agree to the next steps in updating the Action Plan for Pacific Education before it is launched to ensure it is relevant and meaningful in the context of COVID-19.

Summary

- Given the impact of COVID-19 on the education experiences of Pacific learners and their families, a review of the critical components of the Action Plan for Pacific Education (Action Plan) is required to ensure they remain relevant and meaningful.
- Because the vision, guiding principles and key system shifts are based on talanoa and evidence about what works for Pacific learners and families, they remain relevant in the COVID-19 context. The consequences of the pandemic have, however, exacerbated the barriers to Pacific learners and their families feeling safe, valued and equipped to achieve their education aspirations.
- To make the COVID-19-related needs more visible in the Action Plan, we recommend rewording the fifth key shift in the Action Plan to “Work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs, with an initial focus on needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic” and bringing it forward as the first key shift.
- Whilst the vision and key shifts remain relevant and meaningful, we propose undertaking a process to review the actions in the Action Plan to include any current and future actions to support Pacific learners and their families as part of education’s response to mitigate negative impacts of COVID-19 and to remove or reword actions that may no longer be relevant.
- If you agree to the proposed direction, the Action Plan will give visibility to Pacific learners and families on how they can expect to be supported and could be launched alongside an announcement of any additional support for Pacific learners. We will also work to update the relevant products, including the Cabinet paper, and provide an update in mid-May.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends you:

- a. **agree** that the 10-year vision for Pacific Education and the three guiding principles are still relevant and meaningful and will remain unchanged when the Action Plan is released

Agree / Disagree

- b. **agree** that the key shift “work reciprocally with Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs” will be prioritised as the first key shift and will be reworded to include “*with an initial focus on needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic*”

Agree / Disagree

- c. **agree** that current and planned actions to support Pacific learners and their families as part of education’s immediate and longer term response to COVID-19 will be included in the Action Plan under the first shift

Agree / Disagree

- d. **note** that the actions in the Action Plan will be reviewed using the criteria outlined in paragraph 17 a. – f. to ensure they are relevant and meaningful

Noted

- e. **not release** this Education Report until the Action Plan has been endorsed by Cabinet

Release/Not release



Andrea Schöllmann
**Deputy Secretary
Education System Policy**

21/04/2020

Hon Jenny Salesa
Associate Minister of Education

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Background

- 1 The Cabinet paper “Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030: Pacific success through a whole of system response” was due to progress through Cabinet in the first week of the lockdown and to be launched 14th April, 2020. Due to the lockdown and the discontinuation of the Social Wellbeing Committee during Alert Level 4, the Action Plan did not progress through Cabinet.
- 2 The COVID-19 pandemic is already having a significant impact on the education experiences of Pacific learners and their families and it is appropriate that, prior to a launch, the critical components of the Action Plan be reviewed to ensure they are relevant and meaningful in this new environment.
- 3 The components of the Action Plan in draft form are already acting as a framework to understand the learning and wellbeing needs of Pacific learners and their families. Annex 1 demonstrates how a number of the high level outcomes the Action Plan seeks to address have been used to predict some of the needs and experiences of Pacific communities under Alert Level 3, and to identify potential actions to respond to those. Similar planning was undertaken for Alert Level 4 and, in the longer-term, for a potential recession.

Reviewing key components of the Action Plan

Action Plan 10-year vision and guiding principles

“Diverse Pacific learners and their families are safe, valued and equipped to achieve their education aspirations”

Reciprocity	Pacific diversity	Sustained effort
Build and maintain positive, collaborative, reciprocal relationships	Understand, value and respond to the diverse experiences and unmet needs of different Pacific communities	Ongoing commitment to support and resource actions that are evidence-based and that work for Pacific learners and families

- 4 This vision and the three guiding principles were developed based on talanoa, research and the ideas shared through the 2018 and 2019 fono. The vision and principles are relevant and meaningful in all circumstances, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic and potential global recession. We recommend that the 10-year vision and the guiding principles remain the same.
- 5 The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social and economic consequences are already creating more barriers to Pacific learners and their families feeling safe, valued and equipped to achieve their education aspirations. Our broad efforts to respond to the needs of learners and families must have an unrelenting equity focus to safe-guard the learning of Pacific learners and their families.
- 6 Our actions must also support Pacific learners and families in ways that work for them – working reciprocally, responding to diversity and providing sustained support. Education will play a critical role in the ability of Pacific communities to weather a potential recession and their education aspirations must be supported.

Five key shifts



Confront systemic racism and discrimination in education



Enable every teacher, leader and educational professional to take coordinated action to become culturally competent with diverse Pacific learners



Partner with families to design education opportunities together with teachers, leaders and educational professionals so aspirations for learning and employment can be met



Grow, retain and value highly competent teachers, leaders and educational professionals with diverse Pacific whakapapa



Work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs, such as growing Pacific bilingual and immersion education pathways

- 7 As with the vision, the key shifts required across the system in the next 10 years are based on wide-ranging evidence about what is needed and on the lived experiences of Pacific learners and families.
- 8 The key shifts are still relevant in the COVID-19 context, but in the short to medium term, Pacific learners and their families will be experiencing needs that have been accentuated by, or arisen because, of the COVID-19 pandemic that need addressing first.
- 9 We have heard through the Ministry for Pacific Peoples' *Daily Insights* and our own channels that Pacific learners and their families have already been impacted by:
 - a. lack of access to devices, internet and quiet spaces to learn;
 - b. lack of accurate, accessible information about COVID-19 or the supports available to deal with consequences;
 - c. balancing looking after family members whilst trying to keep up with online learning;
 - d. financial hardship, for example through loss of part-time employment for tertiary students and difficulty accessing support; and
 - e. food insecurity, whether through not being able to physically get to the supermarket to get what is needed or not being able to afford food on reduced income.
- 10 We anticipate that as time goes on and we move down alert levels, the financial barriers to accessing education will be exacerbated: the ongoing costs of stationery, school transport, uniforms, school lunches, and sanitary items will be harder for many families to afford if they have experienced a loss of income related to COVID-19.
- 11 We also know that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are being felt differently across different Pacific communities. Some families have secure employment and are equipped to support their children's learning, others are experiencing job losses that limit their ability to meet their family's basic needs and may not be well-positioned to be able to support learning.

- 12 Pacific families with children who have disabilities and/or additional learning support needs are likely to find it harder to access the usual supports offered in an education setting.
- 13 We recommend rearranging the key shifts to prioritise the fifth shift of ‘working reciprocally with communities to address unmet needs’ to elevate the urgency of these needs and give visibility of the current and future actions to respond to them. We intend to reword this shift it to make explicit that there is a focus on addressing needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This would mean the first key shift is:

Original wording	Updated wording
Work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs, such as growing Pacific bilingual and immersion education pathways	Work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs, <i>with an initial focus on needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic</i>

- 14 We recommend that the actions that the Ministry and the Government take to support Pacific learners and their families as part of the immediate and longer term response to COVID-19 are captured under this first shift in the Action Plan. This could include the components of the Pacific initiative as part of the wellbeing package if they are progressed. These include:
- a. translation and distribution of important information relating to COVID-19 and impact on schools and learning;
 - b. s 9(2)(f)(iv)
 - c.
 - d.
 - e. support for governance and management of Pacific early learning centres during anticipated recession.
- 15 In this way the Action Plan could coordinate and give an overview of how Pacific learners will be supported through COVID-19. The Action Plan could be launched alongside an announcement of additional funding for Pacific learners and families as part of the upcoming budget processes.

The Actions

- 16 All actions in the Action Plan need to be reviewed because our ability to implement some of the actions in an Alert Level 3 or 4 context is limited. The disruption caused by COVID-19 also means that the Education Work Programme will need to be re-sequenced and prioritised. This means that some actions will be delayed or will be different than previously planned.
- 17 As the actions are wide-ranging and are led by different parts of the Ministry and other education partners (the education agencies plus the Teaching Council) we recommend undertaking a review of all the actions in the Action Plan. The steps we plan to take to review the actions include:

- a. identify relevant officials across the Ministry and education partners to engage in the review process;
 - b. build a set of scenarios based on the voices and experiences of Pacific learners and families in the current context;
 - c. reintroduce the vision, outcomes and key shifts of the Action Plan;
 - d. identify current, future and potential barriers to achieve the desired outcomes outlined in the Action Plan;
 - e. identify actions to address barriers and remove existing actions that are now no longer relevant; and
 - f. sequence the identified actions.
- 18 This process will ensure that the updated version of the Action Plan reflects and responds to the current experiences of Pacific learners and their families, and can signal the medium and longer term education response to COVID-19

Next steps

- 19 If you agree to the recommendations of this report we will:
- a. work through the outlined process to ensure that any actions included in an updated Action Plan will be meaningful and relevant in the COVID-19 context; and
 - b. update the Action Plan products (including the Minister's foreword, the Plan on a Page and the Cabinet paper) and provide marked up copies for your review.
- 20 We anticipate that we will be able to report back on progress regarding both of these by mid-May. We will then work with you on a timeline for approval and release of the Action Plan, informed by the COVID-19 context and alert level.

Proactive Release

- 21 We recommend that this Education Report is not released at this time. This is because final decisions are still to be made on the wider piece of work.

Annexes

- Annex 1: Planning for Alert Level 3

Meeting the immediate needs of Pacific learners and families during Alert Level 3

Desired outcome: There are no financial and material barriers to accessing education for Pacific learners and families (both online and in person)

Expected impact from COVID-19 on Pacific learners and families

- Growing financial pressure to have basic needs met due to loss of income
- Access to digital device, connectivity and support for distance learning not reaching all Pacific learners
- Finding a quiet place to work puts pressure on learners and families to support distance learning
- Costs to physically attend school if needed (transport/stationery) are barriers to attending
- Financial hardship for tertiary students losing part time work
- Right information not getting to Pacific communities at the right time in languages they can access

Response needed:

- Hard copies of accessible materials for distance learning and ongoing support to access devices and connectivity
- Regular information in Pacific languages about who you can contact for help
- Access to wellbeing and mental health supports
- Income support to those studying who may not be able to study, including apprentices
- Coordinating feedback from Pacific communities in one central point and communicating regularly from one point
- Access to support for attendance costs, such as transport or uniform costs and wider financial and housing support

Desired outcome: Pacific families feel confident supporting their children in education (both online and in person)

Expected impact from COVID-19 on Pacific learners and families

- Moving between distance and on site learning may be stressful and confusing for children and family members
- Family members may be taking on the role as teacher, on top of their own work and family commitments
- Families and educators will have different levels of contact and relationships may be strained
- Families may lack confidence in using digital technology and find it even harder to talk with their child about their learning
- Families may be supporting tertiary students who have returned home to learn online
- Families and learners may have different preferences about learning at home or at place of learning and this could create tension

Response needed:

- Clear accessible guidance on expectations of learning at Level 3 and regular communication with places of learning
- Culturally responsive home/online learning materials
- Accessible materials, regularly refreshed, that support families to engage with their children in some learning (based on evidence about what works for parents). Need to be online and provided in hard copy, and have translated materials available
- Support for the time of trauma and post-trauma – including practical exercises that help children, young people and adults
- Practical examples of how curriculum can be integrated into everyday life at home

Desired outcome: Pacific learners and families are free from racism and discrimination in education (both online and in person)

Expected impact from COVID-19 on Pacific learners and families

- May be more removed from individual acts of racism in the classroom but not structural racism
- Those with socioeconomic barriers will be facing unfair challenges to have food on the table, have a warm/safe place to learn, have access to books, devices and internet
- Pacific learners with disabilities / learning support needs may be struggling to access the right support
- Learners may be going back into culturally unsafe learning environments after a period of greater family support
- Learners may experience stigma in schooling if family is affected by COVID-19 or a recession
- Learners may experience less culturally responsive teaching

Response needed:

- Focus on getting kids back to places of learning and feeling safe and ready to learn, not on academic achievement
- Materials unpacking COVID-19 and recession situation from diverse perspectives
- Culturally responsive and diverse distance learning materials, including opportunities to contextualise learning
- Access to anti-racist resources for educators, such as Ann Milne's "Audit your white spaces" and "Audit your virtual white spaces"
- Access to wellbeing and mental health support and support for learners with disabilities and/or learning support needs

Desired outcome: Pacific learners' cultures, faith and beliefs are valued in education (both online and in person)

Expected impact from COVID-19 on Pacific learners and families

- Distance learning materials may not be contextualised to be relatable to Pacific learners
- Learners may experience less culturally responsive teaching in on site learning
- Learners may have mixed feelings about returning to on site learning
- Potential for increased opportunities to learn about culture, faith and beliefs through family and bubble members
- Bilingual and immersion pathways not having sufficient support to manage distance learning and resource gaps exacerbated

Response needed:

- Focus on getting kids back in places of learning and feeling safe and ready to learn, not on academic achievement
- Culturally responsive and diverse distance learning materials, including opportunities to contextualise learning
- Using Tapasā as a tool and promoting soon to be developed materials to support teachers and leaders
- Access to wellbeing and mental health support and support for learners with disabilities and/or learning support needs
- Increased support to bilingual and immersion pathways

Guiding principles

Reciprocity

We have a responsibility to provide the right support for families to enable them to support their children: devices, connectivity, networks of support, points of contact, clear communication. We must listen and respond. Where support is not fit for purpose, we must be agile and make changes.

Pacific diversity

Communities have different needs and will be affected differently. A generalised response will not work. We have a responsibility to provide material translated into different Pacific languages and to commit to and invest in the development of targeted actions, resources and communications for Pacific communities.

Sustained effort

Funding and support needs to be provided for a sustained period of time - including both special Covid-19 actions and actions that more broadly support Pacific learners to succeed in education. We must remain committed to tackling systemic racism, lifting culturally sustaining practice and support families to support their children's learning. Innovation and improvements that emerge as a result of the Covid-19 response must be maintained.