



NEW ZEALAND PRINCIPALS' FEDERATION

Providing Breakfast for All Students Who Attend Decile 1 & 2 Schools

NZPF Position Paper

The gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged is rapidly growing in New Zealand and we have soared up the OECD inequality rankings. The gap between the highest and lowest paid groups in our society has now reached a level where we are seeing 20% of New Zealand children living in poverty. The upshot of this, amongst other consequences, is that too many New Zealand children start their day without an adequate breakfast. The lack of food at the start of the day affects them at school and is a major barrier to their learning, social progress and development. This situation impacts not only on these children as individuals but on their peers and their teachers.

Currently there are at least 200,000 children living below the poverty line in NZ. This paper urges all school principals and indeed all stakeholders who wish to be part of an equitable society to support the call to provide breakfast to all students who attend Decile 1 or 2 schools. This position is not to deny that there will be children in higher decile schools similarly affected but the majority will reside in the communities of low decile schools.

Two research articles are drawn on to support this position. They are studies that have been undertaken by the charitable organization "Child Poverty Action Group" (2011). The first, published in July 2011 is authored by Wakim & Johnson and entitled Hunger for Learning Nutritional Barriers to Children Learning and the second, edited by M Claire Dale, Mike O'Brien and Susan St John is entitled Left Further Behind: how policies Fail the Poorest Children in New Zealand. Both papers urge the wider community to take responsibility for providing the students who attend Decile 1 & 2 Schools with a balanced nutritious breakfast meal to begin their day's learning at school.

ALL children, irrespective of the status and position of their parent/carer, are entitled to the best possible support from their parent/s and all New Zealand society. Together, we share responsibility for ensuring that children are given that support. While charity can make a useful contribution to assist and support children and families experiencing particular stresses, it cannot solve the problem of poverty, and poverty is the major problem facing around 200,000 New Zealand children. That solution requires collective action from families and communities; and it requires a commitment from the Government to make investing in our children the highest priority (Wakim & Johnson, 2011)

NZPF supports the views outlined in this research. Whilst the issues of inequality that lead to children living in poverty have to be addressed at a higher political and economic level, children's hunger is an immediate issue. It will be necessary for the wider community to ensure that children attending school with little or no food to sustain their day's learning activities is addressed immediately. Indeed, it is a requirement under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which New Zealand is a signatory.

*To date, most public discussion of hungry children in New Zealand has placed a strong emphasis on parental inadequacy as being the fundamental reason children go hungry. The evidence suggests otherwise, and it is time to put the blaming of parents to one side and to focus on improving the educational outcomes of affected children. There are two fundamental reasons for this: the first is that New Zealand is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under the Convention, State parties have an obligation to ensure children receive adequate nutrition because children have rights on their own account. The second is more pragmatic and far reaching: New Zealand is facing a massive demographic shift as its population ages and as baby boomers work fewer hours and require more, and more expensive, care. **As a nation, New Zealand will need every one of those hungry children to be an educated, well-informed and functioning citizen. Providing breakfasts for them is not a total solution but it is a cost effective step along the way.** (Dale, O'Brien & St John, 2011)*

There are many schools that currently have a range of sponsored food programmes such as Breakfast in Schools, Fruit in Schools and Lunches in Schools. However the sponsors of these with the best of intentions over time tend to change their sponsorship directions. These sponsors are

commercial businesses open to the cut and thrust of the market's forces. They are not positioned to undertake a sustained programme of food provision for schools and could never offer the long term certainty that children in these schools require.

The solution of child hunger must centre on the needs of the children presenting in our schools every day. The issues of inequality, lack of family resources and parenting issues which drive this situation are problems which can be dealt with separately. Our duty is to act in accordance with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and act now. Interventions that will ensure every child in New Zealand will be adequately fed and ready to learn at school must be sustainable and be funded appropriately.

Children who attend low decile schools for a variety of reasons also tend to have a higher rate of absence from school and of being late to school. Having breakfast provided before school begins would also be a positive way to attract all students to be at school in the first place especially on Mondays and Fridays and from 8.00 till 8.30am each morning in time to be prepared emotionally, socially and physically for the day ahead.

Recommendation:

NZPF recommends that governmental agencies provide substantial breakfast meals, including daily protein, to all low decile schools and resources a paid worker to co-ordinate the programme in each school.

References

Hunger for learning. Nutritional barriers to children's education.

Janfrie Wakim and Alan Johnson

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Child Poverty Action Group Inc. www.cpag.org.nz

Left Further Behind: how policies fail the poorest children in New Zealand

A Child Poverty Action Group Monograph Edited by M.Claire Dale, Mike O'Brien and Susan St John
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