

Ngā Aukaha | Learning Support

Roundtable discussion

Ngā Aukaha are the lashings that bolster and give strength to the waka. All in together you can support the call for tamariki to get the learning support they need.

Learning Support need far outstrips provision. Teachers, principals, learning support specialists and whānau and parents have long been calling out for learning support to be provided to all mokopuna who need it, not rationed out according to an inadequate funding formula. What is needed is far greater numbers of teacher aides and specialists to provide the learning support needed.

At meetings across Aotearoa held in the first quarter of 2024 teachers identified increased provision of learning support as one of their top priorities.

Educators have identified five key solutions:

- Teacher aide support for all mokopuna that need it.
- Increase the number of learning support specialists working with mokopuna and teachers.
- Fund learning support specialist roles for all schools (e.g. LSC/SENCO).
- Move from a formula based to needs based provision of learning support.
- Lift professional learning for teachers on how to support mokopuna with learning support needs.

The Minister of Education has also identified learning support as one of her priorities for education. Yet in the 2024 budget there was no new funding provided to learning support. In fact, schools' operations grant, one of the key funding sources for teacher aides, was increased by less than the rate of inflation, which means a cut in real terms.

When the Minister does talk about the need for learning support she doesn't speak about addressing the gap in provision, she talks instead about measuring what is done. Rather than increase staffing and resourcing the focus is on "optimising" current learning support provision. She has set out a five point plan that includes improving data collection and creating a data-driven funding model*. This points to more frustration for parents and educators who already struggle with criteria for accessing woefully under-resourced learning support.

Setting up a roundtable discussion

The Minister says her plan will draw on direct feedback from the education sector and disability community yet she has not set out how she will gain this feedback nor has she said how the considerable feedback already provided by educators, and parents and whānau, through the Highest Needs Review will shape the way forward.

Again, you, your colleagues and the parents and whānau in your community must speak up about the unmet learning support needs you face and the solutions you want to see.

Holding a roundtable discussion on learning support needs will formulate the feedback you want the Minister and government to hear.

Setting up your roundtable discussion

1. Talk with school or centre leadership about the opportunities to bring together you, your colleagues and parents and whānau to discuss learning support needs.
2. Identify the people at your school or centre who have contact with parents and whānau who may be interested in participating in a leaning support needs discussion
3. Select a time and venue that will be comfortable for all and where you and those joining you will be at ease.
4. Communicate clearly on the kaupapa of this discussion. This isn't about telling those attending what is needed, it is about asking and listening. And it centres on the question – what is needed to support the tamariki you all care about?
5. A simple online resource has been created to provide a framework for your roundtable discussion and a place to gather your feedback. You can fill this in together as you you're your discussion. This information can then be used to shape and support our campaign for increases to learning support. <https://forms.office.com/r/GQQjdMYjQR>

Roundtable discussion outline

1. What is your experience of the unmet learning support need in your community.
2. What would make a difference?
 - Teacher aide support for all mokopuna that need it.
 - Increase the number of leaning support specialists working with mokopuna and teachers.
 - Fund learning support specialist roles for all schools.

- Move from a formula based to needs based provision of learning support.
 - Lift professional learning for teachers on how to support mokopuna with learning support needs.
 - Or is something else needed?
3. What would the impact of the changes you favour be on the tamariki receiving support?
 4. What do you think of the Minister's plan for learning support – what are the pros and cons?

Learning Support Awareness Day

Thursday 29 August 2024 is the inaugural Learning Support Awareness Day – an opportunity to highlight the learning support needs in your community. While you are holding your roundtable discussion it is an ideal opportunity to share ideas for this day.

* <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/targeting-learning-support-for-better-student-achievement/>