



**NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

## *Media Release*

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### ***Board of Trustees model should be strengthened***

#### **Attn Education reporters**

There are good reasons to continue to further strengthen the board of trustees system rather than look for alternatives, says New Zealand Council for Educational Research chief researcher Dr Cathy Wylie.

She was commenting on the release of her paper, “School governance in New Zealand: how is it working?” Parents of school-aged children have until March 29 to vote in elections held every three years to elect boards of trustees responsible for governing schools.

Dr Wylie’s research paper contains new findings from a New Zealand Council for Educational Research survey of secondary schools conducted in 2006. It also draws on earlier surveys of primary and secondary schools, and other sources, to assess how boards of trustees are faring.

She says the 2006 survey of principals, trustees and parents indicates that at any one time there are problems within boards in around 10-15 percent of schools. Most trustees and principals agree their board lacks some expertise, with strategic planning and legal skills the biggest gap.

But she says there’s no evidence the system is about to fall over, or that any problems are so widespread, intransigent or costly to student learning that a new form of school governance should be considered. The survey shows boards are relatively stable and most trustees are very positive about their role. Three-quarters report a very good working relationship with their principal and a further 18 percent say the relationship’s good. Principals have a similar perspective.

There are good reasons for strengthening the board of trustees system by seeking to address the issues they do face, Dr Wylie says. After more than 16 years of self-managing schools, it’s time to be more realistic about how much volunteer trustees are asked to do.

“On average they can commit to around four hours a week – and no more. If we want boards to focus more on strategic planning and the analysis of students and school performance data, we need to look at the tasks that can make this difficult and what can be done to reduce the attention they take.”

Her recommendations include:

- adequate funding for the employment of administrative staff to service school managers and governors.
- measures to help schools get to grips with legal, regulatory and policy changes. Ministry of Education should provide a helpdesk network so schools have ready access to expertise. It could also develop new policy templates so schools don't always have to come up with their own solutions.
- Ministry of Education could develop and disseminate material to help boards focus on school strategic planning and review.
- any new policy should be able to pass the test: does this increase school workloads?

Dr Wylie says boards also need more help with what is perhaps the most important task they're expected to undertake: the appointment of the principal. The survey shows most do seek some external advice but she goes further by recommending they be required to include a member from a local team of accredited educational professionals contracted by the Ministry of Education in the appointments process and for principal appraisals.

She also believes it may be time to set up an educational disputes resolution process for individual parents and students. It would provide quick resolutions to keep students engaged in learning, but would also serve to keep track of issues requiring a more systemic response.

*For more information, or to interview Dr Wylie, contact NZCER Communications Manager Sarah Boyd on 04-8021468, or 027-2314300.*

*The summary of the paper and a pdf version of the full paper are available at [www.nzcer.org.nz](http://www.nzcer.org.nz)*

#### ***About NZCER***

*The New Zealand Council for Educational Research is New Zealand's only independent, educational research organisation. Established in 1934 through grants from the Carnegie Corporation, it became a statutory body in 1945 and now operates under its own Act of Parliament. Its key focus is to provide educators, students, parents, policy makers and the public with innovative and independent research, analysis, and advice. NZCER is not formally attached to any government department, university or other educational organisation.*

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