



The Nation Needs You

In early April 2007 elections will be declared for the Boards of Trustees of the nation's 2,500 State Schools following voting by each school's parent body. Shortly afterwards the new Boards will commence their serious role of governing and managing their particular school.

The election will be the seventh since the landmark 1989 school reforms which ushered in the self managing school model. These reforms are one of the finest legacies of the former Minister of Education, the late Prime Minister, the Right Honourable David Lange.

Many people are unaware that over the years, and it is still occurring, a steady stream of enquiring overseas politicians and professionals have trodden a pathway to this country to see how our system of schools works.

The fundamental question in the heads of these people is, how can parents run schools? The answer is quite simple. Parents today are increasingly well educated and know what a good education looks like. Information for their decision making is readily available to them, while principals and teachers know that by working in partnership with their elected parents, the young people at the school, most times, get a good deal as a result.

Parents, after all, are their children's first educators and while they frequently ask for guidance and support from the teaching profession, by working together, young people are the net beneficiaries.

The other major benefit of the New Zealand school system is that it recognizes the mosaic of diversity that is reflected in each school community. We have learned in the last ten years that the philosophy, culture and local diversity of a school provide the frame work for educational success. When these aspects of a school's functioning reflect what its local community wants, success normally follows.

We need to recognise that education is a moral enterprise as well as one where knowledge and skill acquisition are important. Trustees are able to have a big say in what values and standards their school will espouse. It is through these less tangible but nonetheless vital parts of the education process that trustees are able to influence how their children learn.

Education is undoubtedly the engine of fairness. Without a commitment to life long learning, however, students will be left behind and so will the nation, clearly a situation we cannot allow to happen.

Therefore, when school trustee nominations are called for in late February and early March, any citizen who believes in the country's future could consider offering themselves for election for their local school board or on the board of the school their young relatives attend. It is another case of "the nation needs you."

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CEO
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