



# SPANZ

SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND INC.

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**President**  
Graham Young  
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## President's Comment 29 – "Mission On"

Dear Colleague

Principals will hear today of this government initiative. It is about promoting healthy eating and encouraging kiwi kids to become more active and it is to become the focus of a new action plan for schools. It is driven by the fact that *"more than 50% of New Zealanders are now overweight or obese. Most alarmingly more than 30% of our children can already be classified as the same" ... Nutrition and the Burden of Disease, New Zealand 1997 to 2011.*

Around health issues such as obesity, drug use and sexuality, my views are often at conflict. On the one hand, ensuring that our young people have healthy lifestyles can only be achieved by young people themselves choosing to take such options. As a consequence affirmative education programmes are needed, whereby they understand that their body is such a wonderful thing that why would they want to damage it. Mandating that the school canteen is not allowed to sell sugar drinks or dictating to young people what they will or will not eat simply will not work. On the other hand, there is a debate that needs to be had around what we want schools to do. If parents and other government agencies, for example Health and Children & Young Persons, are abdicating their responsibilities, and diet, sex and drug education for example are now the most important part of our curriculum, then the community at large, having debated this, needs to inform us of such.

The pleasing aspect of "Mission On" is that it gives cognizance to both of my conflicting views. On the one hand this is not a newly mandated dictatorial programme. It is aimed at building on many of the very positive programmes already in existence (indeed I believe there are up to 450 healthy eating and physical activity programmes operating in this country both inside and outside the classrooms of our schools). The focus of "Mission On" is around positive programmes that enable young people to make informed decisions about good lifestyle by improving nutrition and increasing physical activity. Those young people in the target group (0 to 24 years of age) will remain in the driver's seat. They will make the choice about what they do. On the other hand, however, this is not an initiative that the education sector will take sole responsibility for, but rather it will be the combined strategy of a number of government agencies apart from education and including Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Health, with the penholders being Sports & Recreation New Zealand. Indeed in launching "Mission On" the Prime Minister made the comment that *"We all have a responsibility to do something within our homes, our schools and our communities"*.

The only question that SPANZ has with respect to this affirmative initiative is around whether this means a new compliance requirement for the self-management concept of our schools which SPANZ promotes. Whilst it is our understanding that we will not police school lunches or dictate to families, there is among the initiatives however, a need for all schools to change the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs). This change will require school boards to develop policies that promote and achieve healthy nutrition and reduce consumption of unhealthy food and drinks.

A few years ago secondary schools were required to develop policies which promoted healthy choices in school canteens so that they could access funding from SPARC. The work done then should assist schools in meeting the NAG without undue effort. The consultation would involve schools seeking clarity about how they would achieve compliance with the NAG during a visit by ERO. Some certainty about the

accountability of schools to policy should alleviate any major concerns we might have with this new initiative.

As an organisation we support any effort to keep students focused and engaged. From time to time principals and staff members express concern about the low level of engagement in classes because of the dietary choices students have made at interval and lunchtimes. Any focus to help lift classroom engagement and eliminate behaviour emanating from unhealthy foods is positive.

SPANZ Executive encourages you to consider the impact of the NAG and its benefits and to match those to considered comments about implementation and accountability.

Finally, whilst I know the heat goes off in terms of day-to-day operations over the next couple of weeks, I do appreciate you will be involved in staffing, timetable, budget issues and many other decisions for 2007 and beyond. Nevertheless, your own health, wellbeing and fitness for the job is paramount at this time of the year. The SPANZ Executive joins me in wishing you well for the next two weeks and in so doing encourages you to have some quality family and recreational time out.



Graham Young  
**President**  
**Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand**