

Teacher Only Days, Strikes and Paid Union Meetings...why are they necessary?

Cyclone Closure: 14th February 2023

Paid Union Meeting: 27th February 2023

Strike 1: 16th March 2023

Curriculum Refresh Teacher Only Day: 24th April 2023

Paid Union Meeting - 1pm -3pm Wednesday 31st May 2023

Biannual TA Combined Teacher Only Day - 16th June 2023 or "Field Days Friday"

The purpose of this document is to try to shed some light on the current issues facing schools across NZ so you can understand the reasons behind strikes, paid union meetings or school closures.

Did you know that each of the roles that operate within our school are covered by a different Collective Agreement (CA) or contract? Each one is re-negotiated every 3 years. Principals are separate from teachers, then there's support staff, library, administration, cleaners and caretakers. Beyond our school, there are different CAs for secondary principals, secondary teachers, area schools, specialists and early childhood. Therefore it's very easy to be confused as you listen to the news or the radio and they reel off the various union names that cover each of these separate roles and the actions they are taking.

The most prominent union name for primary school principals, teachers, support staff and administrators is NZEI.

Three years ago, in the last round of negotiations, principals and teachers were negotiated for at the same time. The perspective of many is that this worked well for the teachers as it showed a collective solidarity. NZEI boasts a membership of 46,000 + educational members. However, it was felt that principals missed out on some of the key items they were asking for, as they were 'lumped in' with a bigger group whose needs took precedence.

This time round the principals have kept largely separate from the teachers' negotiations, however we did strike together earlier in the year.

For the past month or so principals have adhered to 'work to rule' action. This is where we do not engage with the Ministry and work strictly to the hours we are paid for; 8am - 5pm, meaning we do no more for our school or community. Personally, I found this extremely difficult. I understand my role isn't easy to see as such, so you'll just have to trust me when I tell you there is no way I can get through my workload during those hours, let alone attending meetings outside of the school day for my additional responsibilities. However, I tried to follow the rule to the best of my ability and have just ended up with a larger backlog of work to do during the evenings and weekends in an attempt to catch up. Thankfully, 'work to rule' has been paused for the time being.

During this time negotiations have continued by representatives from the primary sector.

Last week there was an indication that another nationwide strike day was imminent - this was tentatively scheduled for Wednesday 31st of May. It is important to note that school management are not officially informed until two days prior to the day, to cause as much disruption to the Ministry as possible. At 8.15pm on Saturday evening, an email was sent to advise that the potential strike day was paused as another offer for primary **teachers** is expected on Tuesday 30th. Instead, the union is enforcing their rights to a **Paid Union Meeting** during the hours of 1pm - 3pm on Wednesday 31st May to discuss the offer. There is usually a requirement for 14 days notice of a paid union meeting, but under the circumstances the Secretary of Education has waived that so teachers will have time to review the offer at the earliest opportunity in the hopes it will then be accepted. Only 4 of our teachers are NOT union members. I am legally obliged to allow every other teacher who is a member to attend the meeting. This means school is kept open for **supervision only, by the 4 remaining teachers**. The teacher aides are on a strict schedule monitoring and supporting some of our students who have higher needs than most and are not available to help. So even though school is officially open for supervision (not instruction), **I ask that you consider collecting your child or children at the earlier time of 12.30pm this Wednesday.**

If this 4th offer from the Government is rejected by teachers, the National Executive has stated that members of the union will be balloted on further industrial action. This *could* coincide with the TA Combined School Teacher Only Day on "Field Days Friday" which is the 16th June 2023.

There are many reasons why principals and teachers are holding fast during negotiations this time round. Please understand that it is about more than money. It is about access to better support for our struggling learners and children with special needs. I won't go into details to protect the mana of our students and their families but we offer significant support to some of our students to help them to live their best life at our school. Mostly, it is about getting equity with our secondary school colleagues who get higher pay and more release to do their job *during* work hours rather than during our weekends. It is about supporting small rural school principals who get paid LESS than deputy principals in schools like ours, because our pay system is based on our roll size. Principals can not earn extra money (called units which are currently valued at \$4000 each), for extra responsibilities like teachers can, even though rural principals are often cleaners, caretakers, teachers, payroll and principals all rolled into one. Principals are beginning to leave the field in droves. Many, before they have been in the roll for five years! We need to focus on making teaching and leading schools a desirable role or our educational system will be facing significant shortages of experienced professionals before long.

Let's hope that the offer for teachers this Tuesday is a good one and that it is followed up with a decent offer for my principal colleagues.

We are truly sorry for the interruption to learning for our students. Because of the teacher only days, we are required to keep the school open later in the year than previously advertised. Our last day of the school year will now be Monday 18th December 2023. We assume that many of you will wish to keep your children home after Friday 15th December, so Monday will be largely a clearing up day and moving any furniture etc. We will finish just after lunch and no buses will be available as they are run by the college which will long since be finished.

Finally, in order to keep our students safe on Wednesday, we need to know how they are getting home and who will be collecting them. Teachers will release the children at 12.30pm so they can walk to the car, meet their sibling or parent but they will escort all other children who require supervision between 12.30pm and 3.00pm to the hall. After School Care will begin at 3pm as normal and any children still at school by then will be charged for the first hour of care. Buses will run at 3pm as usual.

This email is sent in the hopes that some warning will give you time to prepare alternative care or rearrange work commitments.

We thank you for your support.
Kind regards
TAPS Primary School Board

Please use this strip to advise us on how your children are getting home on **Wednesday 31st May**

Child/Children's Names:	Room	Leaving at 12.30pm	How and with who?	Staying at School
		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Parent/Caregiver Signature: _____