# New Zealand overhauls secondary education with AI-focused curriculum and qualification reforms



The New Zealand Government has unveiled a series of significant changes to secondary school education, with a strong emphasis on artificial intelligence (AI) integration and curriculum reforms aimed at better preparing students for future job markets. Education Minister Erica Stanford announced that alongside new subjects, the curriculum will increasingly reflect the importance of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). A notable proposal includes the development of a new Year 13 subject dedicated to Generative AI, which would explore how digital systems work, principles of machine learning, cybersecurity, and digital ethics.

These proposed curriculum changes form part of a broader overhaul of the country’s qualification system. The government plans to replace the current National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) with a new certification framework. Under this system, NCEA Level 1 would be substituted by foundation literacy and numeracy tests, while Levels 2 and 3 would be replaced by a New Zealand Certificate of Education and an Advanced Certificate, respectively. Students would be required to study at least five subjects and pass a minimum of four to earn each certificate, with grading on an A to E scale.

Minister Stanford highlighted that AI will play a central role in this transformation, particularly in marking assessments. She indicated that without the use of AI technologies, the ongoing changes would pose significant challenges and require substantial additional investment in the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). The government already utilises AI for marking literacy and numeracy exams, and plans to expand this use by the time the new qualifications replace NCEA Level 2, anticipated around 2029. The intention is to harness AI to streamline assessment processes and maintain rigorous standards while reducing administrative burdens.

However, the proposed changes have elicited mixed reactions from educators. While some teachers’ unions have expressed cautious optimism—conditioned on robust implementation and resourcing—a sizeable group of 89 principals has called for an immediate halt to the NCEA replacement process. These school leaders have urged the Minister to revisit the proposals with deeper engagement from educators, especially those serving high-equity index communities that may be disproportionately affected. Despite these concerns, Stanford has underscored that the reform development was done in consultation with the sector and guided by an advisory group of principals, acknowledging a range of views within the educational community.

Beyond secondary education reforms, the government has also taken steps to improve literacy and numeracy among younger students. Starting from Term 1, 2024, all primary and intermediate students in Years 0 to 8 will receive an average of one hour daily instruction in reading, writing, and maths. Additionally, to enhance focus and reduce classroom distractions, the use of cellphones in classrooms is set to be banned.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has publicly endorsed the changes, describing the revamped qualification framework as a move towards a "world-class" education. Speaking during a media visit to Botany Downs Secondary College alongside Minister Stanford, Luxon said the government's ambition was to equip young New Zealanders with qualifications that set them up to drive the country forward in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

With AI rapidly becoming a key educational tool, New Zealand’s planned overhauls aim to position its students advantageously for technological and economic shifts ahead. The success of these reforms will, however, depend on effective implementation, adequate funding, and continued engagement with educators on the ground to ensure the changes deliver equitable and meaningful outcomes.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/360820637/new-push-ai-education-minister-erica-stanford-announces-curriculum-changes)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/360820637/new-push-ai-education-minister-erica-stanford-announces-curriculum-changes), [[2]](https://www.odt.co.nz/news/national/ai-will-aid-ncea-replacement-stanford-rnz)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.odt.co.nz/news/national/ai-will-aid-ncea-replacement-stanford-rnz), [[3]](https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/569037/watch-live-erica-stanford-faces-questions-over-plan-to-replace-ncea), [[4]](https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/08/05/ai-will-aid-with-ncea-replacement-education-minister-says/), [[7]](https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/569307/watch-christopher-luxon-and-erica-stanford-reiterate-ncea-overhaul-will-be-world-class)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://newsroom.co.nz/2025/08/28/principals-plead-for-govt-to-stop-politically-driven-ncea-replacement/), [[1]](https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/360820637/new-push-ai-education-minister-erica-stanford-announces-curriculum-changes), [[4]](https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/08/05/ai-will-aid-with-ncea-replacement-education-minister-says/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/first-steps-100-day-plan-education-removing-distractions-and-teaching-basics-brilliantly)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/569307/watch-christopher-luxon-and-erica-stanford-reiterate-ncea-overhaul-will-be-world-class), [[1]](https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/360820637/new-push-ai-education-minister-erica-stanford-announces-curriculum-changes)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/360820637/new-push-ai-education-minister-erica-stanford-announces-curriculum-changes> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/national/ai-will-aid-ncea-replacement-stanford-rnz> - Education Minister Erica Stanford has announced that artificial intelligence (AI) will play a significant role in replacing the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) system. The proposal includes replacing NCEA Level 1 with foundation literacy and numeracy tests, and Levels 2 and 3 with a New Zealand Certificate of Education and an Advanced Certificate. Students would need to pass at least four out of five subjects to earn each certificate, with grading on a scale from A to E. Teachers' unions have expressed cautious optimism, provided the changes are well-implemented and resourced. Stanford highlighted that AI would be crucial in this transition, especially for marking assessments, stating that without AI, such a shift would be challenging without substantial investment in the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).
3. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/569037/watch-live-erica-stanford-faces-questions-over-plan-to-replace-ncea> - Education Minister Erica Stanford has addressed media at Rangitoto College regarding the government's plan to overhaul the NCEA system. The proposed changes involve replacing NCEA Level 1 with foundation literacy and numeracy tests, and Levels 2 and 3 with a New Zealand Certificate of Education and an Advanced Certificate. Students would be required to take five subjects and pass at least four to earn each certificate, with grading on a scale from A to E. Teachers' unions have expressed cautious optimism, provided the changes are well-implemented and resourced. Stanford emphasized that AI would be instrumental in this transition, particularly for marking assessments, stating that without AI, such a shift would be challenging without substantial investment in the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).
4. <https://www.1news.co.nz/2025/08/05/ai-will-aid-with-ncea-replacement-education-minister-says/> - Education Minister Erica Stanford has addressed media at Rangitoto College regarding the government's plan to overhaul the NCEA system. The proposed changes involve replacing NCEA Level 1 with foundation literacy and numeracy tests, and Levels 2 and 3 with a New Zealand Certificate of Education and an Advanced Certificate. Students would be required to take five subjects and pass at least four to earn each certificate, with grading on a scale from A to E. Teachers' unions have expressed cautious optimism, provided the changes are well-implemented and resourced. Stanford emphasized that AI would be instrumental in this transition, particularly for marking assessments, stating that without AI, such a shift would be challenging without substantial investment in the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).
5. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/first-steps-100-day-plan-education-removing-distractions-and-teaching-basics-brilliantly> - The New Zealand Government has introduced changes to ensure all children receive a world-leading education, with all primary and intermediate students to be taught an average of one hour a day of each of reading, writing, and maths, and the distraction of cellphones to be removed from classrooms. Education Minister Erica Stanford says these changes in the 100-day plan are the first steps in the coalition Government’s plan to lift student achievement. Starting from Term 1 2024, all students in Years 0 – 8 will be taught reading, writing, and maths for an average of one hour a day in each subject. The Government has also announced that the distraction of cellphones will be removed from classrooms.
6. <https://newsroom.co.nz/2025/08/28/principals-plead-for-govt-to-stop-politically-driven-ncea-replacement/> - A group of 89 principals has written to the minister, calling on her to immediately halt the process to replace NCEA with a new secondary school qualification. The principals, representing schools from across the country, have asked the minister to stop the process and revisit the proposals, after fully engaging with educators and the sector – especially those serving students from high equity index (lower decile) communities, which are expected to be most impacted by the proposed changes. But Erica Stanford said that the proposed changes had been designed with the sector, and led by her advisory group of principals, adding that there was always going to be a range of views. There would also be fewer subjects to choose from and more end-of-year exams, which will largely be marked by AI.
7. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/569307/watch-christopher-luxon-and-erica-stanford-reiterate-ncea-overhaul-will-be-world-class> - Changes to the country's secondary school qualifications framework were about giving kids a 'world class' education, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said. Luxon and Education Minister Erica Stanford spoke to media during a visit at Botany Downs Secondary College on Thursday afternoon. It comes after Stanford said the Qualifications Authority used AI for marking NCEA literacy and numeracy corequisite exams and would use it more widely by the time the Certificate of Education replaced NCEA level 2 in 2029. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon speaking at Botany Downs Secondary College with Education Minister Erica Stanford. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon speaking at Botany Downs Secondary College with Education Minister Erica Stanford. Photo: Calvin Samuel / RNZ. Luxon said they were meeting with students who would 'drive New Zealand forward from here'. In relation to the NCEA overhaul, Luxon said it was 'about giving our kids a qualification that is world class'.