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To: h.parata@ministers.govt.nz
Subject: Education Concern

To the Hon. Hekia Parata:

I am a sixth year mathematics teacher, and hold a university degree that majors in mathematics. I am writing to express my disappointment in the NCEA Level 1 Algebra MCAT and the resulting response from NZQA.

The NCEA Level 1 Algebra MCAT left many teachers, parents and students disillusioned in NZQA's ability to administer an assessment at the appropriate level in the curriculum. As a teacher of mathematics, I believe that we should have high expectations for all our students; however, by setting an MCAT that is beyond New Zealand Curriculum level 6 simply sets all students up to fail. At a time when STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is being promoted as an area that is experiencing shortages, to fall at the very first formal assessment that is the gateway to STEM careers will be off-putting to students. The work teachers put into building students' confidence and enjoyment in mathematics has effectively been destroyed by an unfair assessment.

NZQA's continued denial of wrongdoing shows that they do not want to ensure that they create credible and robust qualifications. The complaints to NZQA by the teaching, student and parent community have been ignored. One of the responses from NZQA representative Kristine Kilkelly was that this achievement standard is "only four credits". Such comments are facetious and indicate a lack in understanding of the importance of mathematics. It belittles the hard work students have put into this subject, and sends the message that hard work does not deserve a reward.

Furthermore, NZQA's lack of accountability is disrespectful to the teachers that deliver the curriculum to our students. Their inability to publish a sincere apology and provide an appropriate solution to the problem they have created has been an insult to qualified mathematics teachers. We are professionals who care deeply about New Zealand's future, and to have our concerns pushed aside or to be spoken to with weak platitudes behind closed doors shows that NZQA does not value us. New Zealand should not be surprised that there is a shortage of mathematics teachers if we are essentially being told by NZQA that our professional opinions do not matter. With their behaviour, NZQA risks alienating even more mathematics teachers, and losing them to other, more financially lucrative, professions.

Many of the mathematics associations and other teachers have written to NZQA recommending a way forward, starting with a heartfelt apology taking responsibility for their errors. As the Minister of Education, I urge you to exert your influence on NZQA to repair the damage they have done with this assessment. By continuing to deny accountability, NZQA could create a rift that will become irreparable in time and to create such ill-feeling between teachers, parents and students against NZQA is beneficial to no one.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Chow
Mathematics Teacher