

Pathways to Equity and Wellbeing: Taking Action for Systemic Change.

Complex Community Concern:
Secondary Education—2024



Impact Collective

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Whakataukī

Whāia te mātauranga hei oranga mō koutou.

Seek after learning for the sake of your wellbeing.

This whakataukī emphasises the importance of learning as a foundation for wellbeing. By following the path of knowledge, the world will be your oyster.

Our Manutaki



This design is based around the manutaki, the lead bird that guides the flock in a triangle formation during migration, the manutaki is supported and protected by rest of the flock.

This represents working together in unison for a common purpose.

Above the manu is the design known as manaia which can be used as a human form side profile of a face this represents unity of two people coming together, this forms koruru/whetu a face, this represents being transparent.

The design above the manaia/koruru is a design known as paakura it symbolises the rae of spiritual essence or spiritual belief it also represents the footprint of pukeko and is about being cautious knowing your surroundings, your environment before making decisions.

On the side of the bird's wings are two more manaia in a bird form this relates to interconnectedness our relationship with each other.

Next to this is a design known as whakarare this represents change and a new direction.

The harakeke/weave is about intergenerational relationships, it also symbolises binding of the kōrero or kaupapa.

At the bottom of the wing is a design known as pikopiko/koru this represents new beginnings and also represents nga tangata people/community.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi— Our Commitments

The Impact Collective is committed to being responsive to Māori as tangata whenua and recognise Te Tiriti o Waitangi as Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document. The principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as articulated by the Waitangi Tribunal and the New Zealand Courts provides a framework for how we are to fulfil our obligations under Te Tiriti on a daily basis. More recently, as outlined by the Ministry of Health, in 2019, the Hauora Report articulated five principles for primary care that are applicable to not only the wider health care system, but also to any person, organisation or Crown Agency working with Māori in our communities.

These principles are articulated as:

- Tino rangatiratanga: The guarantee of tino rangatiratanga, which provides for Māori self-determination and mana motuhake in the design, delivery, and monitoring of community services.
- Equity: The principle of equity, which requires the Crown to commit to achieving equitable outcomes for Māori. This is achieved through breaking down barriers and enabling equity of access to ensure equality of outcomes.
- Active protection: The principle of active protection, which requires the Crown to act, to the fullest extent practicable, to achieve equitable outcomes for Māori. This includes ensuring that it, its agents, and its Treaty partner, are well informed on the extent and nature of both Māori wellbeing outcomes and efforts to achieve Māori wellbeing equity.
- Options: The principle of options, which requires the Crown to provide for and properly resource kaupapa Māori services. Furthermore, the Crown is obliged to ensure that all services are provided in a culturally appropriate way that recognises and supports the expression of Te Ao Māori models of service delivery.

- Partnership: The principle of partnership, which requires the Crown and Māori to work in partnership in the governance, design, delivery, and monitoring of community services. This includes enabling Māori to express Tino Rangatiratanga over participation in governance, design, delivery, and monitoring of community services.

For the members of the Impact Collective, it is important that we enable the principles to guide our mahi. The purpose of the current mahi is to provide community level insights and intelligence to enable communities to partner on the development of services to create positive impacts for the people throughout the community. These services should focus on addressing equity of access to services in a manner that is consistent with tino rangatiratanga, active protection in the co-design, provide options to ensure culturally appropriate services and developed through a solutions focused, community-led partnership approach.

Acknowledgements

We’ve been privileged to collaborate with a number of individuals, organisations, and partners who have informed and supported the mahi of the Impact Collective. We extend our heartfelt thanks to each of them below:

Community Organisations

We engaged with over 400 individuals, representing approximately 130 organisations across four regions. These interactions have been crucial in ensuring that our work is grounded in the community voice and reflects the real, everyday experiences of those within each community. Their willingness to share their stories, challenges, and successes has not only enriched our understanding but has also underscored the importance of our collective efforts towards improving equity and wellbeing for all.

DOT Loves Data

Our data partner, DOT Loves Data, boasts an incredibly talented team of data scientists and data engineers specialising in building simple, smart, and beautiful data visualisation tools. They have been instrumental in creating the Community Compass Data Dashboard, allowing us to have a single source of truth to gather data insights for various communities across Aotearoa. They have also played an integral role in supporting and advising our team as we endeavour to bring together the data insights with stories from the community.

The Impact Collective Charitable Trust

The Impact Collective established the Impact Collective (2020) Charitable Trust in November 2022. We would like to thank those that stood up as trustees, and those who continue to support the mahi through leadership, advice and significant funding contributions. The Impact Collective maintains its charitable kaupapa by continuing to provide these essential community level intelligence reports, free of charge, to the communities that have allowed us to share the taonga of their stories.

Blindspot New Zealand

Blindspot New Zealand Limited is a specialist consulting company that was established in 2021. Blindspot Consulting continues to work closely with the Impact Collective to ensure the delivery of community level intelligence reports through systems strategy, community engagement, governance and thematic analysis support. We would like to thank the team from Blindspot New Zealand Limited for your continued dedication to enabling a better informed Aotearoa New Zealand.



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Definitions and Acronyms

Absenteeism – Missing school or work, often without valid justification.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – Traumatic events that occur during childhood, such as abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction, which can affect long-term health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) – The simulation of human intelligence by machines or computer systems.

Ako – The Māori term for ‘to learn, study, instruct, teach, advise’.

Aotearoa – Te Reo Māori for ‘New Zealand’.

Bias – Unconscious or conscious prejudice towards certain groups, ideas, or perspectives, which can influence attitudes, actions, and decisions.

Biculturalism – The official recognition of two cultures.

Bullying – Repeated, intentional behaviour that harms, intimidates, or isolates others, physically, verbally, socially, or online.

Charter Schools – Publicly funded but privately operated schools with greater autonomy in curriculum, staffing, and governance.

Cisgender – A term describing individuals whose gender identity matches the sex assigned to them at birth.

Co-design – A collaborative approach to designing solutions or systems, where stakeholders, especially end users, actively contribute throughout the process.

Co-requisite Tests – Standardised tests or assessments that must be completed alongside other learning or qualifications to demonstrate competency.

Community Compass Data Dashboard – A digital tool by Dot Loves Data for visualising quantitative data.

Community-Led – Approaches or initiatives driven by the community itself.

Complex Community Concerns – Also known as systemic challenges, systemic issues, or wicked problems.

COVID-19 – An acute disease caused by a coronavirus, characterised by fever, cough, and potentially severe complications, especially in the elderly or those with underlying health conditions.

Cultural Responsiveness – The ability to understand, respect, and adapt practices to align with diverse cultural values, needs, and worldviews.

Cultural Safety – An environment where people feel safe, respected, and free from cultural discrimination.

CV – Curriculum Vitae, a document detailing one’s professional and academic history.

Decile System – A funding system previously used in Aotearoa New Zealand, where schools receive funding based on socioeconomic factors in their communities.

Deficit Thinking – A perspective that blames individuals or communities for their perceived shortcomings, rather than systemic inequities.

Digital Citizenship – The responsible and ethical use of digital technologies, including online safety, communication, and participation.

Digital Literacy – The ability to use digital tools and technologies responsibly, safely and respectfully.

Digital Pedagogies – Teaching and learning practices that incorporate digital tools, resources, and platforms to enhance education.

Early School Leavers – Students who leave school before completing their qualifications or reaching the legal school-leaving age.

Equity – Ensuring fairness by addressing systemic barriers so everyone has equal opportunities to thrive.

Equity and Wellbeing Profiles – Reports created by the Impact Collective Charitable Trust that present data on equity and wellbeing within regions of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Ethics – Moral principles that govern decision-making and behaviour, ensuring fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Exclusion – The practice of removing a student from school for serious misconduct, often leading to barriers in accessing education.

Financial Literacy – The knowledge and skills to effectively manage personal finances, including budgeting, saving, and understanding financial systems.

GDP – Gross Domestic Product, the total value of goods produced and services provided in a country during one year.

Gender Stereotypes – Generalised and often limiting assumptions about roles, abilities, or behaviours based on gender.

Good Mahi Stories – Positive examples of impactful work and initiatives that exist within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Hāpu – The Māori term for ‘sub-tribe’ which consists of extended whānau (families) descended from a common ancestor.

Harakeke – A native New Zealand flax plant.

Hauora – The Māori word for ‘health and wellbeing’ encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Heteronormative – The assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, which can marginalise LGBTQ+ identities and perspectives.

Human Dignity – The recognition and respect of every individual’s inherent worth and value, regardless of their circumstances.

Hybrid Learning – A blended learning model combining in-person teaching with online or digital learning components.

Implicit Bias – Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence behaviour, often without awareness.

Inclusion – Ensuring all individuals, regardless of their background or abilities, are welcomed, valued, and able to participate fully.

Instagram – A social media platform for sharing photos, videos, and stories.

Intergenerational Trauma – Trauma passed down through generations, often as a result of historical injustices, colonisation, or adverse experiences.

Intersectionality – The interconnected nature of social identities, such as race, gender, and class, that can create overlapping systems of discrimination or privilege.

Interventions – Targeted actions designed to address specific issues or improve outcomes for individuals or groups.

Intimate Partner Violence – Abuse or harm within intimate relationships, including physical, emotional, financial, or psychological violence.

Iwi – The Māori term for ‘extended kinship group, tribes’ based on whakapapa (genealogy).

Kai – The Māori word for ‘food’

Kaitiakitanga – The Māori principle of ‘guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship’.

Definitions and Acronyms

Kapa Haka – A traditional Māori performance art.

Kaupapa – The Māori word for ‘purpose’.

Kōhanga Reo– Māori-language immersion early childhood centres.

Kura – The Māori word for ‘school’

Kura Kaupapa Māori – Schools where Te Reo Māori and tikanga Māori form the foundation of teaching and learning.

Land-based Education – Learning approaches focused on practical skills and sustainable practices, often centred around the land.

LAWA – Land Air Water Aotearoa.

LGBTQ+ – An acronym referring to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and other gender and sexual identities.

Life Skills – Practical abilities essential for independent living, such as budgeting, cooking, problem-solving, and communication.

Living Standards Framework (LSF) – A Treasury tool in New Zealand measuring wellbeing across social, economic, and environmental domains.

Mahi – The Māori word for ‘work, do, perform, make, accomplish’

Mana – The Māori word for ‘prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma’.

Mana Motuhake – A Māori term for ‘autonomy, self-government, self-determination, independence, sovereignty, authority’.

Mana-enhancing – Practices or actions that uphold and strengthen an individual’s or group’s mana (dignity, respect, and authority).

Manaakitanga – The Māori concept for ‘hospitality, kindness, generosity, support’.

Manutaki – A leader or guide, often in a cultural or organisational context, providing direction and support.

Māori– Indigenous person/people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Māori-Medium Education – Schools where Te Reo Māori and tikanga Māori form the foundation of teaching and learning.

Marae – A sacred meeting ground and communal facility for Iwi, Hapū or Whānau.

Marginalisation – The process by which individuals or groups are excluded or disadvantaged due to systemic inequities or discrimination.

MSD – Ministry of Social Development

NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) – New Zealand’s main secondary school qualification, assessed through internal and external methods.

Neurodiverse – A term recognising the diverse ways brains function, including conditions like ADHD, autism, and dyslexia.

NGO – Non-Government Organisation.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) – A forum where the governments of 37 democracies with market-based economies collaborate to develop policy standards to promote sustainable economic growth.

Opportunities to Learn (OTL) – The extent to which students are provided access to quality education and learning resources.

Our regions – The geographical areas of Whanganui, Rangitīkei, Ruapehu, and South Taranaki.

Pākehā – The Māori word for ‘English, foreign, European’.

Parental Involvement (PI) – The active participation of parents or caregivers in their children’s education and development.

Permaculture – A design philosophy focused on creating sustainable systems that mimic natural ecosystems, often applied in farming and gardening.

Prototyping – An iterative process of creating and testing models or solutions to refine and improve them before implementation.

Qualitative Data – Non-numerical information collected through observations, interviews, or narratives, capturing in-depth insights.

Quantitative Data – Numerical information collected through measurements or surveys, often used for statistical analysis.

R.E.A.P – Rural Education Activities Programme.

Rangatahi – The Māori word for ‘youth, young people’.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) – Education programmes that promote healthy relationships, consent, and understanding of sexuality and identity.

Restorative Practices – Approaches to resolving conflict that focus on repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, and fostering accountability.

RNZ – Radio New Zealand.

Rohe – The Māori word for ‘boundary, district, region, territory’.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) – A measure of an individual’s or group’s economic and social position, often based on income, education, and occupation.

Soft Skills – Non-cognitive skills such as discipline, courteousness, teamwork, and communication.

Stakeholders – Individuals or groups with an interest in or influence over a specific issue, project, or community outcome.

Stand-down – A temporary removal of a student from school for disciplinary reasons, shorter than a suspension.

Streamed Classes – Educational groupings based on ability or achievement.

Suspension – A formal disciplinary action removing a student from school for a set period.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Global goals established by the United Nations to address social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Systemic Inequities – Institutionalised disparities within systems, such as education or healthcare, that disadvantage certain groups.

Tangata whenua – The Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori, who hold ancestral connections to the land.

Taonga – The Māori term for ‘property, goods, possession’.

Te Ao Māori – The Māori worldview.

Te Reo Māori – The Māori language.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document, establishing relationships between Māori and the Crown.

Teacher Aides – Support staff in schools who assist teachers in managing classrooms and supporting students with specific needs.

The Big Five – The five most pressing community concerns identified by the Impact Collective Charitable Trust, including Secondary Education, Financial Health and Employment, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Rental and Emergency Housing and Family Harm.

Definitions and Acronyms

Thematic Analysis – A method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data.

Tikanga – The Māori term for ‘correct procedure, custom, practice’, encompassing protocols, values, and practices unique to each Iwi or Hapū.

TikTok – A social media platform where users share videos.

Tino rangatiratanga – The Māori term for ‘self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government’. It is a fundamental principle of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, asserting Māori authority over their lives, resources, and futures.

Transgender– A term for individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.

Trauma-informed – An approach that recognises the impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into policies, practices, and programmes.

Treasury Living Standards (TLS) – A framework developed by the New Zealand Treasury to assess wellbeing across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Truancy – Unjustified or unauthorised absence from school.

Tūrangawaewae – A Māori term for ‘where one has the right to stand’.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) – Education and training programmes focused on equipping students with specific skills for careers in trades and industries.

Vocational Pathways – Educational frameworks in Aotearoa New Zealand that link NCEA achievement to specific industry sectors and career opportunities.

Wairua – A Māori term for ‘spirit, soul’.

Wellbeing – A holistic measure of an individual’s health, happiness, and quality of life across multiple dimensions.

Whakapapa – A Māori term for ‘genealogy’ or ‘lineage’, a core concept in Māori culture connecting people to their ancestors, community, and land.

Whakatauki – A Māori term for ‘proverb, significant saying’.

Whakawhanaungatanga – The process of building relationships and connections, often through shared experiences and mutual respect.

Whānau – The Māori word for ‘family’

Whānau Ora – A Māori health and wellbeing approach focusing on family-centred solutions and outcomes.

Whenua – The Māori word for ‘land’.

Work/Career-Readiness Skills – Practical skills and attitudes necessary for success in the workforce, such as communication, adaptability, and teamwork.

Wrap-Around Services – Comprehensive, coordinated services designed to support individuals by addressing multiple aspects of their wellbeing.

“Tūhonohono is the word that I’m barking around here. If you can make the connection with the kids, the kids can understand that you are a teacher that cares for them. The more you know about them, what they need, and what they want from them and the family, you’re onto a winner.”

Workshop Participant.

The Impact Collective

Operational Team



Ko Ruapehu te Maunga
Ko Whanganui te Awa
Ko Ngati Pākeha tōkū iwi
Ko Croker whanau toku ingoa
Ko Horrocks toku whanau
No Whanganui ahau

Danielle Horrocks
Strategic Impact Director

I am an experienced human-centred strategist, designer and change agent with a wealth of experience working as a consultant across multiple agencies as well as working in-house within large organisations. I have a strong passion for emphasising with and understanding people, their needs, what drives them, and how this then plays out in their everyday experiences. By putting people and their needs at the heart of everything I do I am able to deliver valuable and actionable insights, strategies and outcomes that create meaningful, positive and lasting change.



Ko Whakarara te Maunga
Ko Wainui te Moana
Ko Mataatua te Waka
Ko Ngāpuhi tōku Iwi
No Whakatāne ahau

Briar Goldie
Senior Systems Strategist

I am a community-based researcher and strategist, but above all, a listener. My journey has taken me through roles in user experience design, customer experience, and community-based research, all rooted in my commitment to uplifting people's voices to drive meaningful change. Now, my work and heart lie in creating spaces for people to share their stories and experiences.



Ko Ruahine te Pai Maunga
Ko Rangitīkei te Awa
Ko Tākitimu te Waka
Ko Ngāti Hauiti tōku Iwi
No Whanganui ahau

Caleb Kingi
Creative Director

I'm a cinematographer based in Whanganui. My craft has allowed me to travel over Aotearoa and the world shooting for a range of govt organisations, SME's, NGO's, brands and individuals.

I have a passion for telling stories that bring positive change to people, communities and organisations. I love the place I call home, it's my place of belonging and I feel privileged being connected to the whenua and the people.



Tēnā koutou katoa
Ko Aerana te whakapaparanga mai engari
Ko Te Papaioea te kāinga
Kei Te Papaioea au e noho ana
Ko Josh Ace tōku ingoa
Tēnā tatou katoa

Josh Ace
Senior Designer

I am an experienced graphic designer based in Palmerston North with 10 years in the industry. I enjoy the challenge of telling stories visually and have been lucky enough to have undertaken a wide scope of work with various companies throughout Aotearoa.

All of the skills learnt from those endeavours will serve me well in the exciting future opportunities and mahi with the Impact Collective Team.



Our Kaupapa

For our people, our whenua and our communities. Working together to gather data and people insights across our region to inform and support the best actions to improve equity and wellbeing for all of our people.

Our Principles

Unite together
Breaking down silos and developing genuine and enduring relationships between communities and organisations.

Listen together
Listening and emphasising to ensure everybody within our communities have an opportunity to share their knowledge and lived experiences.

Act together
Working collaboratively to uncover and take action on collective insights, knowledge and experiences.

Our Promises

1 We strive to create equity and wellbeing for all. - Through breaking down traditional organisational and territorial boundaries and focusing on our communities holistically, the Impact Collective strives to enrich foundational data with people’s lived experiences in order to support the co-design of pathways and initiatives across our region that will create positive and enduring impact for all.

We seek to shift from viewing our communities solely in terms of health, wealth, access, or vulnerability, to viewing it in terms of the whole person and their whānau – a mana-enhancing approach.

2 We serve our people, our whenua and our communities. - We are for all individuals, communities and organisations, should they be tangata whenua, tūrangawaewae to the region, or align to the purpose of the Impact Collective.

3 We utilise a collective response - In response to the goals and aspirations of our communities, the Impact Collective will seek not only the data, but also the real-life stories and lived experiences that sit behind it. The data is just our starting point – the stories will provide us with a wealth of insight and the ‘why’.

Together, these provide the foundation for us to craft truly collective insights representative of what matters most to our communities.

Our Communities

On the facing page, we highlight the communities across Aotearoa New Zealand where we’ve had the opportunity to engage deeply and complete comprehensive Equity and Wellbeing Profiles. These profiles represent our ongoing commitment to understanding and capturing the unique strengths and opportunities of each community. As we move forward, our aim is to expand this valuable work, creating profiles for more communities throughout Aotearoa to enrich our collective understanding.

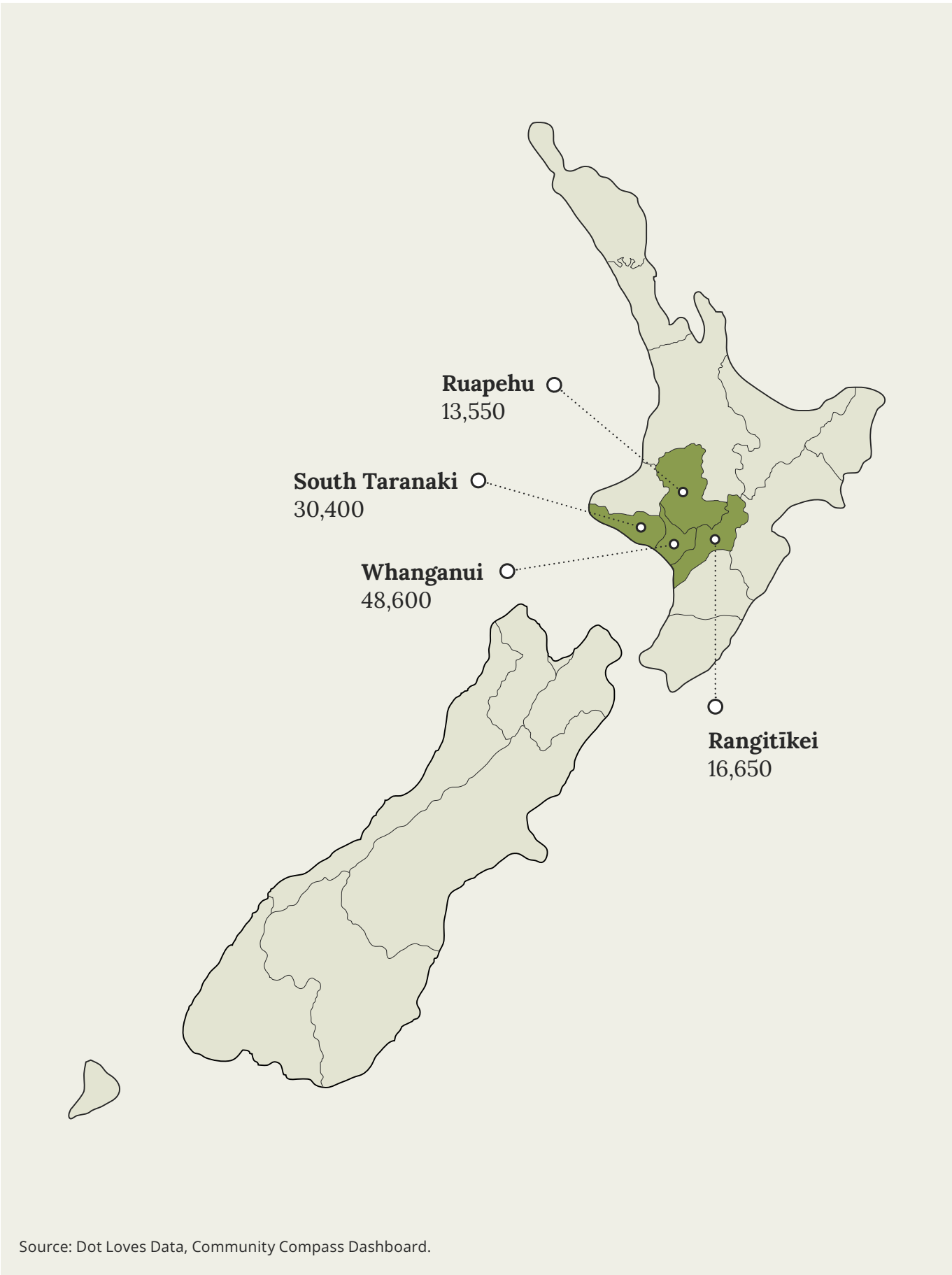


Figure 1 - Snapshot of Communities Engaged by Impact Collective.

Executive Summary

The Pathways to Equity and Wellbeing: Taking Action for Systemic Change – Secondary Education report explores the complex challenges of secondary education and its impact on wellbeing within Aotearoa New Zealand communities.

Aotearoa New Zealand’s secondary education system stands at a pivotal moment, with opportunities to transform challenges into pathways for equity and excellence. Despite systemic barriers and socioeconomic disparities, there is immense potential to empower every student, particularly Māori and Pasifika learners, to achieve their fullest potential. Initiatives like Māori-medium schools and culturally responsive education are already fostering identity, belonging, and pride, demonstrating the power of an inclusive and equitable system.

The resilience shown by students and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic is an example that underscores the importance of adaptability and connection. While the disruptions highlighted gaps in access and support, they also revealed the strength of community-focused solutions and the value of prioritising wellbeing. By addressing mental health, reducing bullying, and fostering supportive relationships, schools can create environments where every learner feels safe, valued, and inspired to thrive.

This report calls on policymakers, organisations, and communities to work collectively in dismantling the systemic barriers that perpetuate education inequities. As the education system evolves, there is a unique opportunity to reimagine success beyond traditional pathways. By combining academic excellence with robust vocational opportunities and future-focused skills, Aotearoa New Zealand can prepare students to lead in a rapidly changing world. With bold leadership, innovative thinking, and collective effort, the vision of an equitable, inclusive, and inspiring education system is within reach—ensuring all students can rise to their potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

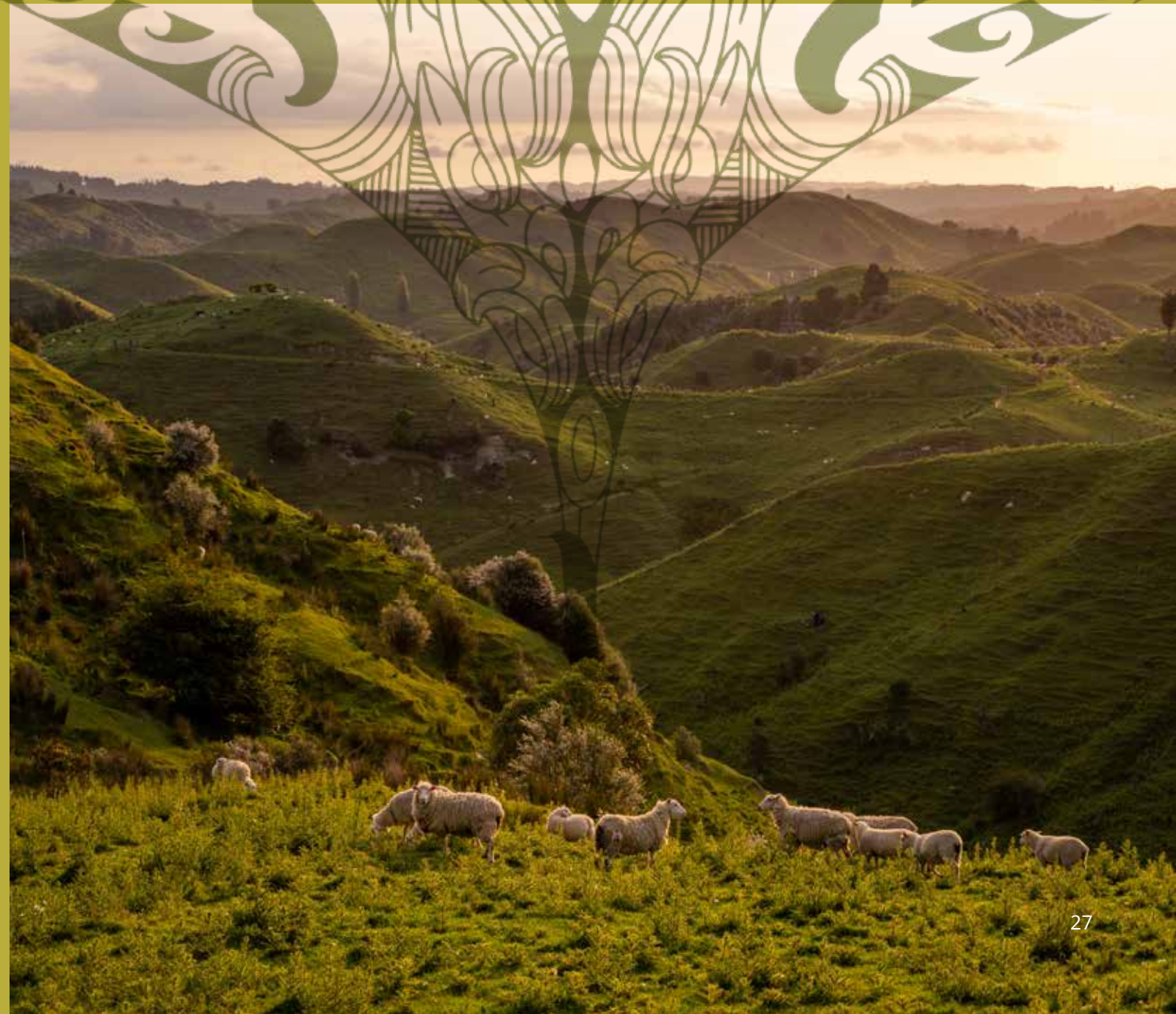
Whaowhia te kete mātauranga.
Fill your basket of knowledge.

Disclaimer and Acknowledgement of Research Scope

As we navigate the complexities of secondary education, it is crucial to acknowledge that this report serves merely as an entry point into a much broader conversation. While we strive for accuracy and depth, we acknowledge our role as facilitators of conversation rather than experts in the field. This report, derived from a high-level analysis of data, literature and community insights, underscores the need for further research and deeper investigation. Such efforts are essential to fully comprehend the complexity of the issue and to develop effective, informed actions for addressing education-related disparities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We therefore invite our readers to approach this report not just as a collection of insights, but as an open call for further inquiry, discussion, and action.

Context Framing



Our Equity and Wellbeing Framework



Figure 2 — Impact Collective Equity and Wellbeing Framework.

Think global, align national, act local.

In order to identify opportunities and measure outcomes within our communities, we have developed a three-tier framework encompassing global, national, and local equity and wellbeing frameworks.

Together, these provide us with over 150 individual indicators with which we can measure equity and wellbeing – acting as a benchmarking tool to begin to explore data insights within our region and identify priority areas that we will seek to understand in much more detail.

The purpose of this combination of global, national, and local frameworks is to ensure that we encompass all elements of equity and wellbeing. While the goals of each can be individually interpreted, each goal has a relationship with all other elements - as such, we have designed the framework to represent the most logical alignments.

Whānau Ora Goals

Whānau Ora is an innovative approach to improving whānau wellbeing that puts whānau at the centre of decision making. The Whānau Ora approach focuses on the whānau as a whole and addresses individual needs within the context of the whānau. Whilst this is a National Framework, the focus on individuals and whānau as its core tenant has inspired the Impact Collective to place these goals at the heart of our framework.

Whānau are supported to identify the aspirations they have to improve their lives and build their capacity to achieve their goals. Iwi and the Crown have agreed to a shared Whānau Ora Outcomes Framework to guide their work to improve outcomes for whānau.

The Outcomes Framework confirms that Whānau Ora is achieved when whānau are self-managing, living healthy lifestyles, participating fully in society, confidently participating in Te Ao Māori, economically secure and successfully involved in wealth creation, cohesive, resilient and nurturing and responsible stewards of their natural and living environments.

Treasury Living Standards

The Living Standards Framework (LSF) represents a perspective on what matters for New Zealanders’ wellbeing, now and into the future. It is a flexible framework that prompts our thinking about policy impacts across the different dimensions of wellbeing, as well as the long-term and distributional issues and implications.

Updated in October 2021, the LSF consists of three levels - Wealth of Aotearoa New Zealand, Our Institutions and Governance and Our Individual and Collective Wellbeing. Level One, Our Individual and Collective Wellbeing, includes 12 domains that have been shown to be important for the wellbeing of both individuals and collectives, such as families, whānau and communities of place, identity and interest. Level Two, Our Institutions and Governance, refers to formal rules, informal norms, and the formal and informal organisations those rules and norms are embedded within.

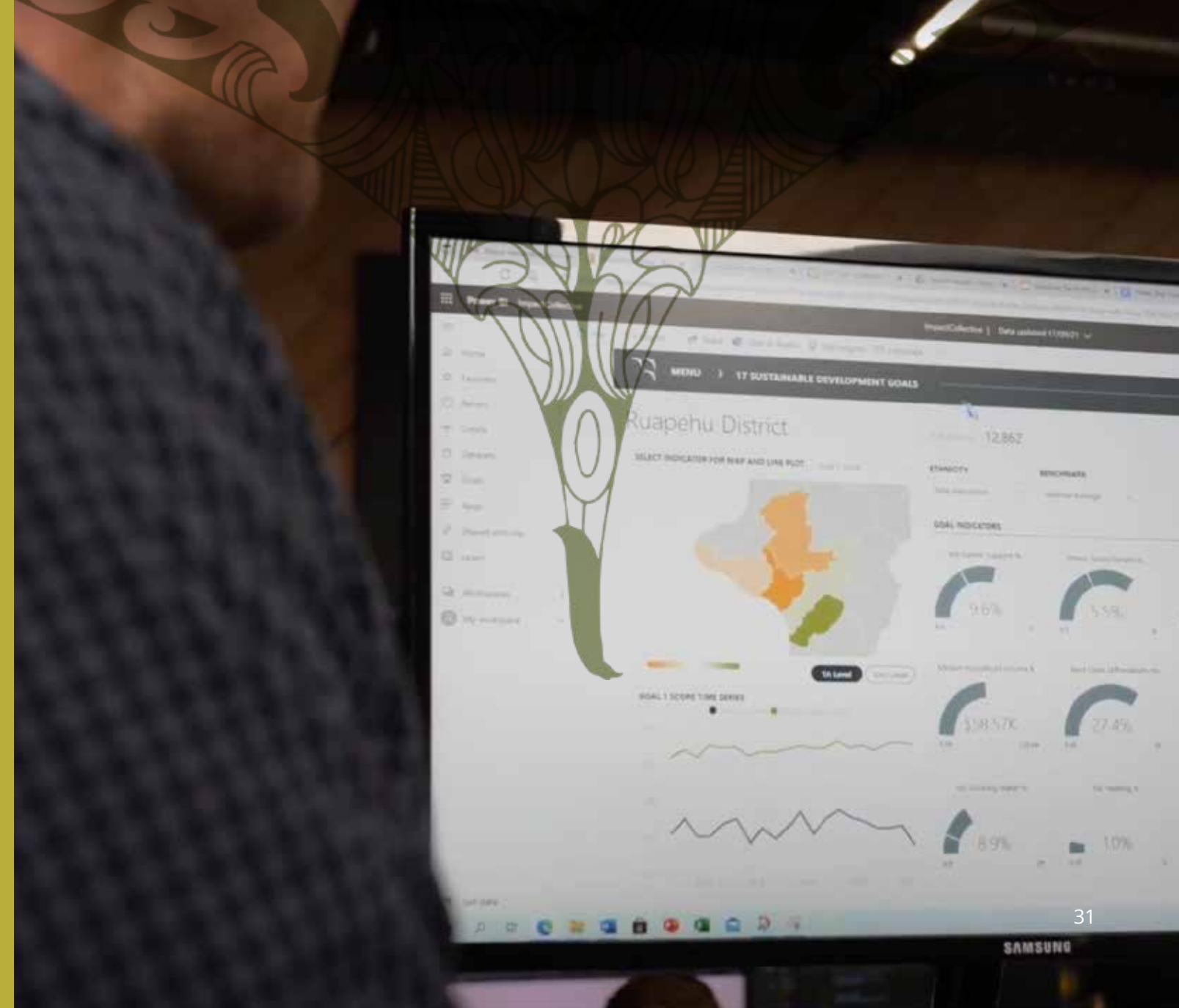
Institutions are often nested in complex relationships. Level Three, outlines the four categories of Wealth of Aotearoa New Zealand; natural environment, financial and physical capital, social cohesion and human capability. These categories recognise that wealth generation in Aotearoa New Zealand is not limited to the historical categorisation of ‘GDP’, but rather the wider determinants of wealth creation - including our people and our environment.

United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals

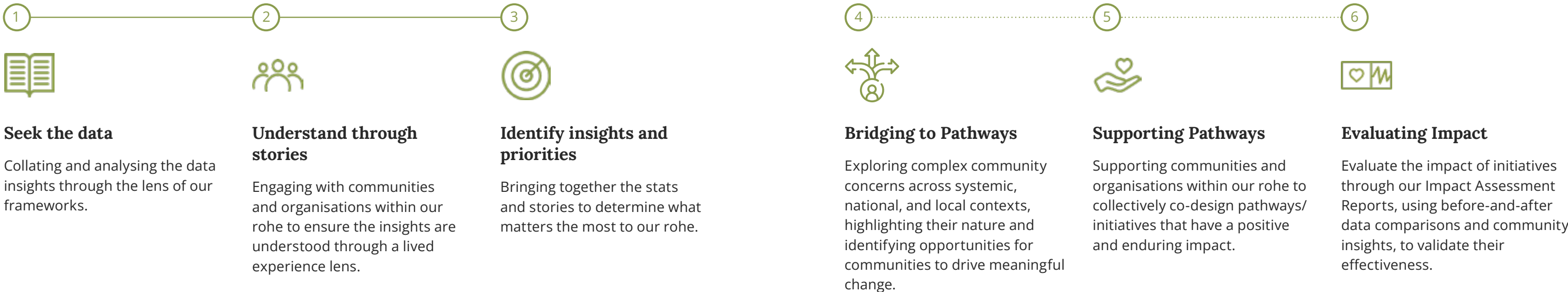
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling environmental and climate concerns and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

Our Methods



A Dual-phased Approach



Phase One

In Phase One, we gather and present community level insights through Equity and Wellbeing profiles, which represent the collective strengths, barriers, and opportunities of specific regions. Phase One includes steps 1, 2, and 3 of our methodology.

To date, we have completed four Equity and Wellbeing profiles, dedicated to highlighting the unique characteristics of the Whanganui, Rangitikei, Ruapehu, and South Taranaki communities.

Phase Two

In Phase Two, we help empower community organisations, Iwi, and government agencies to leverage insights from our Equity and Wellbeing profiles so that they can pinpoint opportunities for community-led initiatives that aim to respond directly to community needs. The Impact Collective can assist by working alongside changemakers to bring community members together for the co-design of these initiatives. Covering steps 4, 5, and 6 of our dual-phased approach, Phase Two is where action begins to take shape.

Alongside this, the Impact Collective intends to conduct an Impact Assessment Report to demonstrate the impact various initiatives have had on addressing the strengths, barriers, and opportunities of each community. While we understand that initiatives can take time to demonstrate impact, by leveraging a maturity-based system, we will be able to monitor and support these new initiatives, helping to validate the effectiveness of their efforts through data and insights gathered from people at the community level.

The aim of the Impact Collective's work is to continue on an ongoing basis, following a continuous cycle of the two phases and their respective steps for the regions we serve.

Phase One—Delivery of the Equity and Wellbeing Profiles

Phase One commences upon request, with the aim to meet the evolving needs of our communities on a continuous basis.

This phase encompasses the initial three steps of our process, tailored to gather deep insights from the unique perspectives within our communities. These steps include:

- 1 Seeking the data.
- 2 Understanding through stories.
- 3 Identifying insights and priorities.

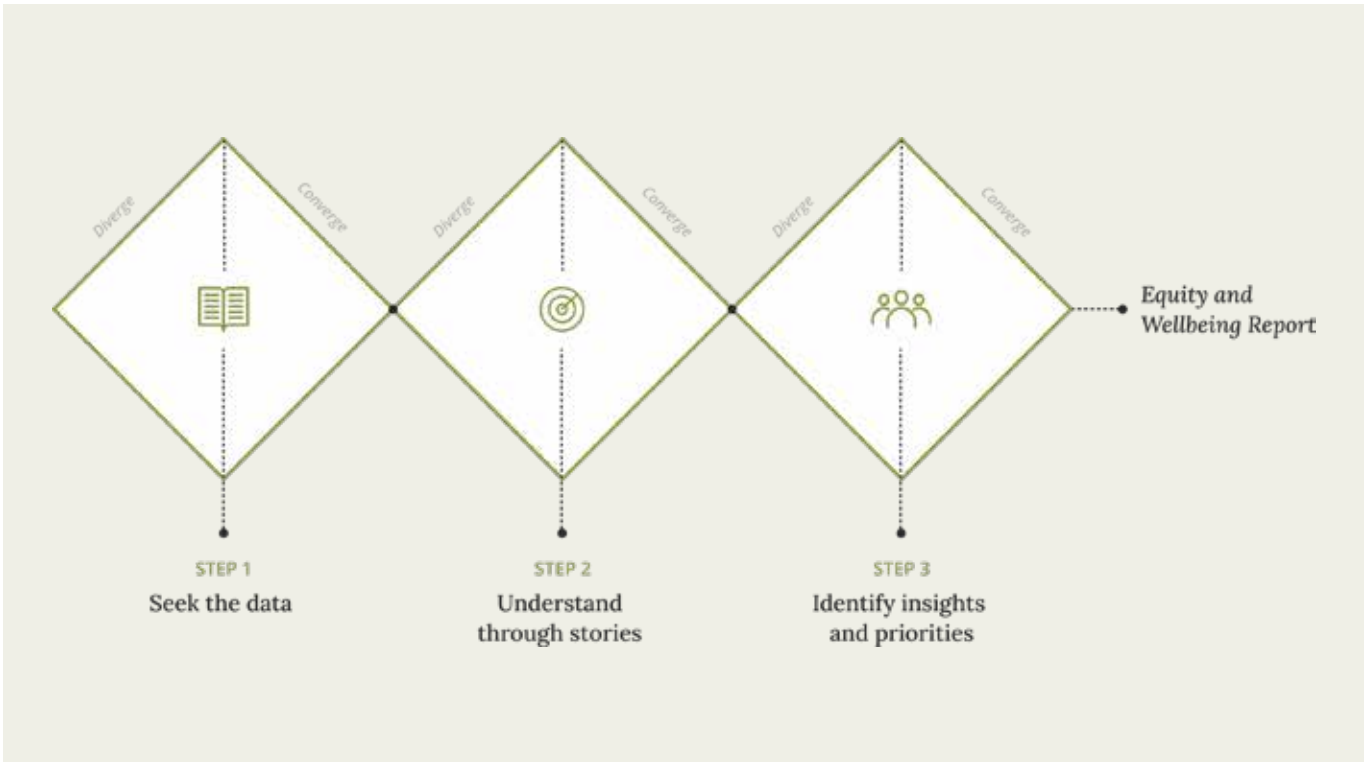


Figure 3 - Phase One of the Impact Collective Process.

Step 1—Seeking the Data.

This step involves collating and analysing data insights through the lenses of our frameworks. Central to this is the Community Compass Dashboard, which pulls up-to-date data from over 100 data sources to measure how communities within Aotearoa New Zealand are tracking. These include over 150 individual indicators that we are able to measure against.

This provides us with a tool to explore data insights with members of our community, and identify areas that require a deeper understanding through their lived experiences.

- Tasks included in this step:
- Collate, analyse, and cleanse data.
 - Identify key areas for further exploration through community workshops.

The Community Compass Dashboard

This dashboard has been developed by our data partner, DOT Loves Data, which has an incredibly talented team of data scientists and data engineers specialising in building simple, smart, and beautiful data visualisation tools.

The dashboard itself is a leading tool in New Zealand that achieves as close to real-time and collective data representation of equity and wellbeing across our communities as possible, unlocking the potential to track and measure the impact of certain initiatives within our communities across the systems they exist within.

It brings together cross-sector statistics to understand the components and dynamics of community wellbeing from multiple perspectives. While it provides a means to measure progress towards wellbeing objectives, this data is most valuable when contextualised alongside community stories and experiences. This dashboard is innovative in measuring wellbeing at the sub-national and local levels and also highlights current data gaps in understanding wellbeing for Māori.

Data sources

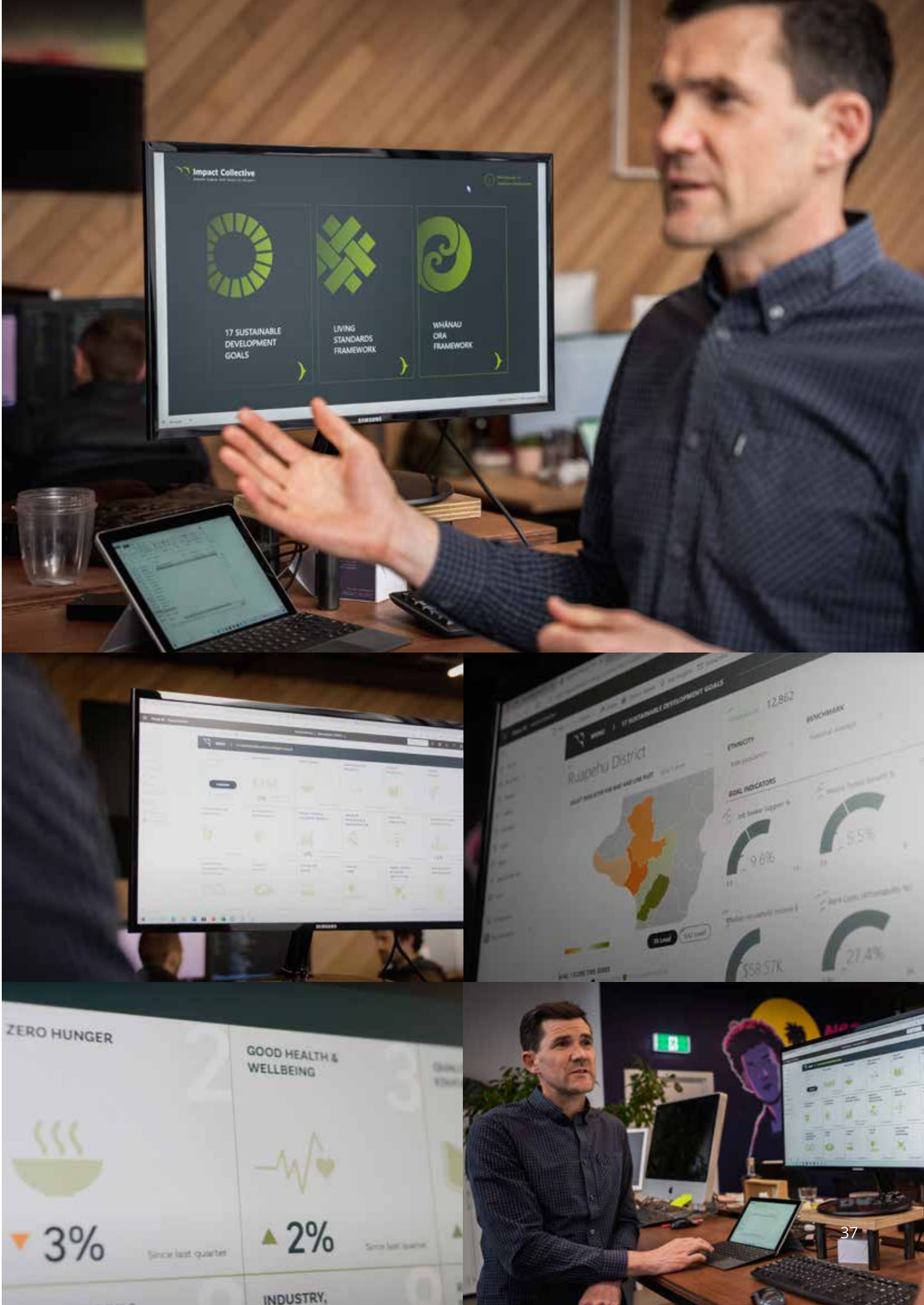
The Community Compass dashboard draws from many validated national and regional data sources to ensure comprehensive coverage across all frameworks and indicators. It was important for the Impact Collective to present data from these validated sources to ensure that, when working with our communities and agencies, the data presented reflects the information held by the government. This will better enable the data to be used by communities when developing community-led services. The primary data sources are listed below:

- NZ Census of Populations and Dwellings (Statistics NZ)
- Ministry of Social Development
- Tenancy Services
- ACC
- Statistics NZ
- Statistics NZ - Child poverty data
- Statistics NZ - New Zealand business demography statistics
- Eftpos NZ
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
- NZ Police
- DOT Loves Data
- Dynamic Deprivation Index: DOT Loves Data product
- Bizmomento - DOT Loves Data product
- Waka Kotahi
- NZ Transport Agency
- NZ Transport Agency Motor Vehicle Register
- Education Counts
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Health - Health survey
- Water New Zealand - National Performance Review
- Open Street Maps
- Electricity Authority
- HealthSpace
- Infometrics
- Chorus
- Tūao Aotearoa
- LAWA

Data gaps and limitations

Throughout the process of data collation, it has become evident that across Aotearoa New Zealand, there are areas where data collection is lacking or non-existent. For example, data can only be provided at a national level, or the intervals between data updates are slow. The significance of this cannot be understated, as it indicates a fundamental lack of quantitative data available to support communities in addressing issues that may be impacting them. Government agencies involved in these areas must support more regionalised and timely access to data to enable communities to design services to ensure a positive impact in the future.

It was also further identified that while ethnicity data is beginning to be collected more frequently, there is still a significant gap in what is being measured and how that impacts Māori communities and Māori service development. Throughout this report, we have ensured that the narratives of Māori participants are portrayed as authentically as they were gifted to us, and that where possible, Māori data is presented.



Step 2—Understanding Through Stories.

By gathering stories through engaging with individuals, groups, and organisations across diverse communities, we ensure the insights collected are understood through the lens of lived experiences. This ensures our insights remain genuine and reflective of the community’s voice and prevents assumptions from being made.

We cannot understate the importance of this step. Without it, we risk relying on assumptions and potentially targeting the wrong issues, disconnected from the real needs of the community members who are most impacted.

Tasks included in this step:

- Facilitate Equity and Wellbeing Workshops with community organisations.
- Conduct in-depth Good Mahi Stories, and podcasts with inspiring individuals and groups across the community.

Equity and Wellbeing Workshops

The purpose of these workshops is to gather stories and lived experiences from communities across Aotearoa, directly from those actively working in and belonging to these communities.

The key objectives of these workshops:

- To understand their kaupapa (purpose) and why they exist.
- To identify the specific needs their organisation or group aims to address.
- To determine who their organisation or group partners with to meet these needs.
- To look beyond their day-to-day mahi (work) to identify and discuss broader community needs, challenges, strengths, and opportunities.
- To discuss current data insights from their community and identify whether they align with or differ from the lived experiences.

Over the course of our research, we have run approximately 94 workshops with over 400 individuals from across four regions, representing 130 organisations. Please see relevant Equity and Wellbeing profiles for individual acknowledgements.

‘Good Mahi’ Stories

In parallel with the workshops, we identified and captured success stories, known as Good Mahi Stories, of individuals, groups, or organisations contributing positively to their community. This allowed us to engage in one-on-one discussions with many local heroes, delving deeper into the needs they aim to address within the community.

Throughout our research, we gathered Good Mahi Stories from approximately 50 individuals, groups, or organisations. Each inspirational story is available on the Impact Collective website in the ‘Our Work’ section; please take a look when you have the time.

Qualitative Data Gaps and Limitations

While we aim to capture a diverse range of lived experiences to accurately reflect the strengths and opportunities of each region, we can face numerous challenges and gaps in gathering qualitative data due to the availability and willingness to engage. Despite these challenges, we remain committed to capturing and incorporating a wide array of lived experiences into our findings to ensure they accurately represent each region.



Step 3—Identifying Insights and Priorities.

In this step, we bring together the wealth of narratives collected through our research, alongside statistics, to pinpoint the areas that matter most to each community. These insights form the foundation of our Equity and Wellbeing Profiles, which aim to capture the collective strengths, challenges, and opportunities of each community.

Tasks within this step include:

- Synthesise stories from community engagements.
- Conduct thematic analysis to unearth insights.
- Validate and refine initial themes with community input.
- Identify systemic connections within our frameworks.
- Compile comprehensive Equity and Wellbeing reports.
- Present findings to stakeholders and the wider community.

Process Overview

Our Systems Strategists undertake a rigorous process to develop each Equity and Wellbeing profile. This begins with capturing the wealth of lived experiences shared during workshops and Good Mahi Stories. To achieve this, each narrative is meticulously transcribed and summarised as anonymised statements, utilising voice transcription tools for precision. A thorough thematic analysis follows, grouping and examining stories to uncover key insights that represent the community.

This initial analysis leads to a set of core themes, which are subsequently validated with the community to ensure that our findings accurately reflect the community’s experiences. Feedback and additional narratives are then integrated, further refining these themes into their final iteration (see figure 4). At this stage, data is incorporated to enhance the analysis and a Community Systems Map is formed to articulate the interconnected nature of each theme. This comprehensive approach results in a detailed profile that showcases each community’s unique strengths, challenges, opportunities, and success stories.

Goals of each Equity and Wellbeing Profiles:

- To accurately reflect each community’s voice and experience.
- To provide a holistic overview that merges lived experiences with data.
- To spotlight the invaluable contributions of community members and organisations.
- To identify and present the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of each region, inspiring community-led action that enhance existing strengths or overcome current barriers.

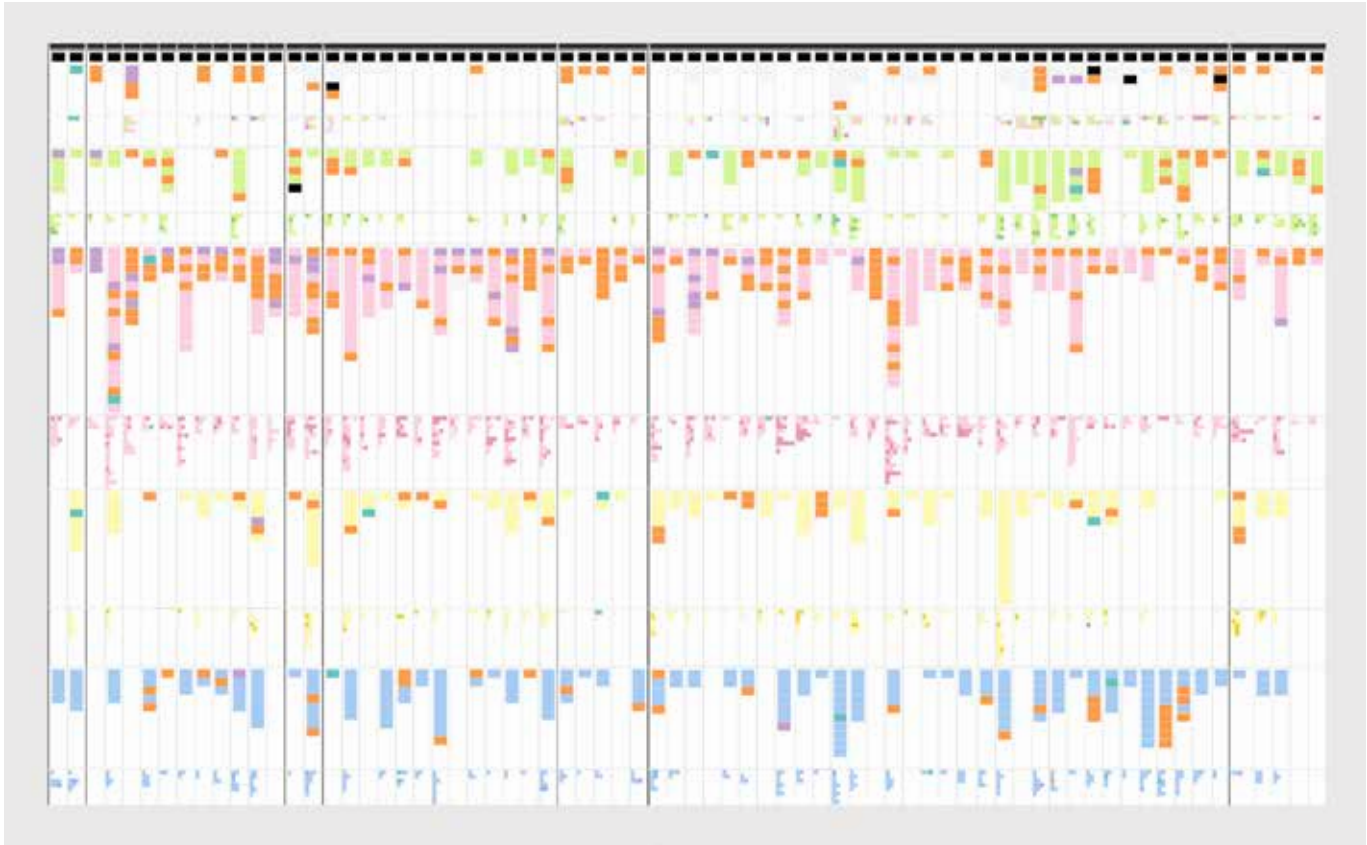


Figure 4 - Comprehensive Insights Map: Final Step in the Insights Process.

Engagement and Presentation:

We are prepared to present or discuss the Equity and Wellbeing Profiles’ insights, either in person or online, to help you gain a deeper understanding of the findings nuances. For those interested in a more detailed discussion, we invite you to contact us directly to arrange a session.

Phase Two—Supporting Collective Action

Following the completion of the Equity and Wellbeing Profiles in Phase One, Phase Two initiates a strategic shift towards turning insights into community actions and initiatives.

This phase encompasses the remaining three steps of our process, designed to foster a collective approach to addressing the needs and opportunities within our communities. These steps include:

- 1 Bridging to Pathways.
- 2 Supporting Pathways.
- 3 Evaluating Impact.

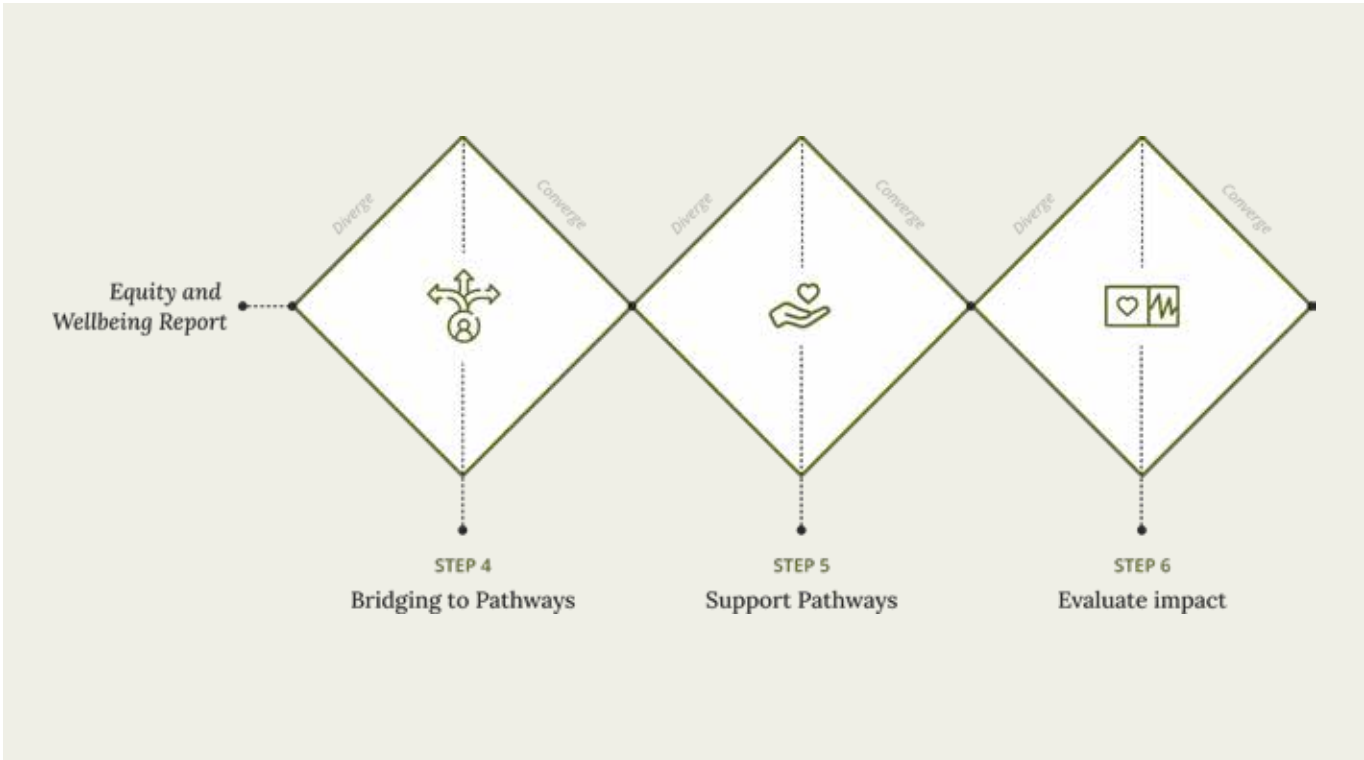


Figure 5 - Phase Two of the Impact Collective Process.

Step 4—Bridging to Pathways

This step serves as a bridge from understanding community needs to taking action to address them. Here, we delve into specific complex community concerns, highlighting their nature across systemic, national, and local contexts and pinpointing opportunities for individuals, groups, and organisations to initiate meaningful change.

The Impact Collective does not intend to prescribe specific actions. Instead, this step aims to equip people with the knowledge and insights they need to forge their own pathways (with or without our support) towards greater equity and wellbeing.

Tasks included in this step:

- Perform high-level thematic analysis to identify key community concerns.
- Collate statistics to enhance our understanding of each concern.
- Review national literature and media to contextualise data and community findings.
- Understand community-specific concerns through a detailed review of local stories.
- Gather and document opportunities identified in the above.
- Highlight examples of successful organisations, models and interventions.

High-level Thematic Analysis

We begin with an expansive review of community findings to identify the most pressing concerns, referred to in this report as The Big Five. This step is conducted at a high-level, aiming to identify concerns that have widespread impact across different areas related to equity and wellbeing.

National Literature and Media Review

Following this, we compile national literature and media reports to underscore the significance of each complex community concern at a national scale. This review helps contextualise the data and community voices collected, ensuring that our analysis also resonates with the national discourse on these issues.

Local Findings Analysis

In parallel with the National Literature and Media Review, we gather stories from communities within Aotearoa New Zealand to identify and delve deeper into each complex community concern at a local level. This approach allows us to understand the key findings specific to each issue according to the community, enriching our insights and ensuring they are grounded in both data and the community's lived experiences.

Further enriching this analysis we re-engage with organisations who are actively working to address specific concerns within their community. These discussions offer in-depth insights into the challenges and outcomes of specific issues, providing perspectives from experts in the field. These discussions aim to:

- Explore the contributing factors of social issues within communities.
- Understand the short-term and long-term impacts of these issues.
- Highlight broader challenges exacerbating these issues.
- Discuss successful local, national, and international interventions.
- Highlight specific individuals, groups, or organisations making a positive impact.
- Identify necessary short-term and long-term strategies for effectively addressing each concern.

In recognition of their contributions, we extend

our heartfelt gratitude to Peter Kaua, Principal of Whanganui City College, and the broader team at Kāhui Ako, for being so willing to share his expertise and experience with us for this report.

Considering the sensitive nature of many complex community concerns, we ensure the safety and sensitivity of those by focusing our discussions on those indirectly involved, such as industry experts and service providers, rather than direct engagement with affected individuals.

Opportunities from the Community

With insights in hand, we shift towards action-oriented strategies, starting with an extensive collection of opportunities, ideas, and pathways, identified by the community as well as national literature and media. These are articulated as clear opportunity statements, inviting readers to explore and engage with each further.

Success Stories and Local Good Mahi

We also highlight the impactful work of various models, interventions, and organisations that have made a significant difference in addressing complex community concerns, drawing from both national and international examples.

Here, we also pay tribute to the Good Mahi undertaken by groups and organisations within Aotearoa New Zealand’s communities. By featuring their dedicated efforts, we shine a light on the initiatives that are tackling complex community concerns head-on and highlight their invaluable contributions to fostering wellbeing at the community level.

Step 5—Supporting Pathways

This step marks the transition from gathering and analysing insights to enabling communities to take action.

The primary aim here is to support communities and organisations in collaboratively co-designing pathways and/or initiatives that will have a positive and enduring impact on equity and wellbeing. This involves building on the community-identified strengths and opportunities and translating these into tangible actions.

Tasks to support in this step:

- Present insights by sharing detailed findings from regional Equity and Wellbeing Profiles, offering an in-depth understanding of local needs and opportunities.
- Validate pathways and initiatives by collaborating with the community to evaluate the potential impact of proposed pathways and initiatives, ensuring they align with the insights previously identified.
- Co-facilitate sessions that bring diverse community voices together to collaboratively design solutions, initiatives, or services.
- Connect community groups with essential resources, such as funding opportunities, expert advice, and potential partnerships, to actualise co-designed plans.

Role of the Impact Collective

Our role at The Impact Collective is to facilitate and empower others to take action. By leveraging our expertise and the insights we’ve gathered, we aim to support and empower communities in discovering and implementing solutions, programmes, and services that drive positive change.

The Impact Collective will walk alongside the community to support the co-design process, bringing together community members, local leaders, and stakeholders to envision, plan, and enact further programmes of work, from exploratory research to implementing new services.

Step 6—Evaluating Impact

With many initiatives facing the common challenge of quantifying their impact to secure continued support or funding, this step is dedicated to understanding and measuring the impact of initiatives at the community level.

Through our Impact Assessment Reports, we evaluate the impact of initiatives through a before-and-after comparison of data and community insights. This comparative analysis not only validates the effectiveness of their efforts, but also surfaces new strengths and opportunities emerging within the community.

Additionally, we assess the impact of these initiatives in relation to the Impact Collective framework and the larger system they exist within, using community narratives as a guide.

This evaluation equips communities and service providers with the vital information needed to refine existing services or, if necessary, create new ones, ensuring that solutions remain effective and aligned with the needs of the communities they serve.

Tasks included in this step:

- Gathering the latest data insights through the Community Compass dashboard.
- Collecting fresh community narratives through workshops, interviews, and Good Mahi Stories.
- Measuring change in both data and community perspectives.

Key Concerns



The Big Five

Drawing on insights gathered from our Equity and Wellbeing profiles and the latest data, we introduce The Big Five. These focus areas encompass the top five complex community concerns within the community. Not only do these concerns highlight key systemic challenges, but they also serve as the foundation for our series of Pathways to Equity and Wellbeing reports. In these reports, we will delve into each concern in more detail, aiming to understand their impacts and connections, with the ultimate goal of inspiring community-led action and fostering change where it is most needed.

Secondary Education

While education is a cornerstone of equity and wellbeing, schools grapple with a myriad of challenges that impact access to and quality of learning for many. Overpopulated schools, a one-size-fits-all curriculum, and prevalent bullying are among the critical challenges. These issues not only affect academic achievement but also student wellbeing and engagement, leading to an array of downstream impacts, such as low achievement rates and increased dropouts. Addressing these concerns includes, but is not limited to, tailoring curricula to diverse learning needs and fostering inclusive, safe learning environments to ensure every child can thrive in their educational setting.

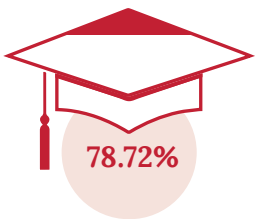
IN 2022, 52.64% OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND GRADUATED WITH NCEA LEVEL 3 AS THEIR HIGHEST QUALIFICATION.

Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.



IN 2022, 78.72% OF NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WERE 17 YEARS OR OLDER WHEN THEY COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL.

Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.



Financial Health and Employment

The economic landscape within our regions reveals a complex interplay of unemployment and financial insecurity that underpins community equity and wellbeing. Financial health and stable employment are foundational to the prosperity of individuals, families, and communities. Yet, current economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, the escalating cost of living, and increasing levels of debt, not only exacerbate financial strain but also contribute to a cascade of related social issues, such as substance abuse, family harm, and mental health struggles, ultimately perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Addressing this concern is undoubtedly complex; however, by ensuring communities have access to the opportunities and support they need, we can pave the way for a more prosperous future where families can thrive.

AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024, THE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN NEW ZEALAND STANDS AT \$99,424.

Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.



THE MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD EQUIVALISED DISPOSABLE INCOME, WHICH IS DEFINED AS HOUSEHOLD INCOME LESS HOUSEHOLD COSTS, IS \$47,534 AT JUNE 2022. THE ETHNIC BREAKDOWN FOR HOUSEHOLD EQUIVALISED DISPOSABLE INCOME IS:

European: \$48,904

Māori: \$41,822

Pacific Peoples: \$40,767

Asian: \$51,001

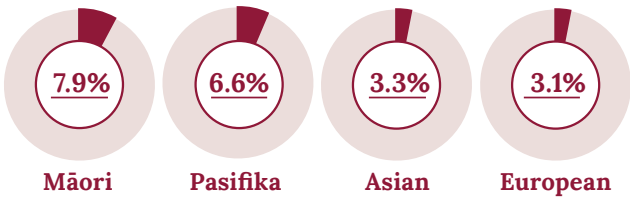
MELAA: \$46,265

Other Ethnic Group: \$49,440

Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.



IN DECEMBER 2023, THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATES ACROSS DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS WERE AS FOLLOWS:



Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and trauma are widespread, significantly affecting the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals and their families. The causes of mental health concerns are multifaceted, including factors such as isolation and economic stress, and can lead to various downstream effects like family harm and suicide. Barriers to accessing care, including long waiting times, high costs, and insufficient crisis support, exacerbate these challenges. The widespread impact of mental health concerns underscores the urgent need not only to address immediate needs but also to tackle the deeper factors contributing to mental distress. By ensuring that mental health support is accessible, inclusive, and effective, we can create a supportive environment where everyone has access to the resources they need.

THE PROPORTION OF PEOPLE WITH POOR MENTAL WELLBEING, IS UP FROM 22% IN 2018 TO 28% IN 2021.

General Social Survey, Statistics New Zealand, 2022.

1 IN 5 ADULTS AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER ARE DIAGNOSED WITH A MOOD AND/OR ANXIETY DISORDER.



Ministry of Health, 2019.

IN 2022, 58% OF YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTED HAVING GOOD TO EXCELLENT MENTAL HEALTH, WHILE 28% SAID THEY HAD EXPERIENCED SERIOUS DISTRESS.

Ministry of Social Development, Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey (2022).

DEMAND FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES IS INCREASING. OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ACCESSING SECONDARY MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES HAS INCREASED BY 10%.



▲10%

Ministry of Health, 2021.

Rental and Emergency Housing

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, secure and affordable housing remains an elusive goal for many. The apparent housing crisis, characterised by a critical shortage of affordable, secure, and quality homes, stands as a significant barrier to equity and wellbeing. This crisis leads to devastating downstream impacts, including homelessness, housing insecurity, and compromised health, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable in our society, such as low-income families, single households, and those with disabilities. Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive approach to ensure that everyone in our community has access to their fundamental right: a safe, affordable home. By tackling the housing crisis, we can pave the way towards a more equitable and healthy future for all residents.

THE MEDIAN WEEKLY RENTAL PRICE IN NEW ZEALAND AS OF JANUARY 2024 IS \$554.11.

Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.



ON AVERAGE, NEW ZEALAND HOUSEHOLDS SPEND 28.98% OF THEIR INCOME ON RENT EXPENSES.

Dot Loves Data, Community Compass Dashboard.



Family Harm

Family harm, a critical symptom of broader societal issues deeply entrenched within our communities, has devastating impacts on individuals and their families. Perpetuated by factors including economic stress, substance abuse, and trauma, the prevalence and severity of family harm, described by some as an epidemic, leads to long-term psychological, physical, and social consequences for those directly and indirectly involved. The significance of these impacts underscores the necessity for intervention, including improved support services and community awareness, to break the cycle of harm and ensure safety and support for individuals and their families so that they can thrive across generations.

INCIDENTS OF FAMILY HARM HAVE INCREASED BY 60% IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS AND ARE PREDICTED TO INCREASE BY AN ADDITIONAL 35% BY 2025.

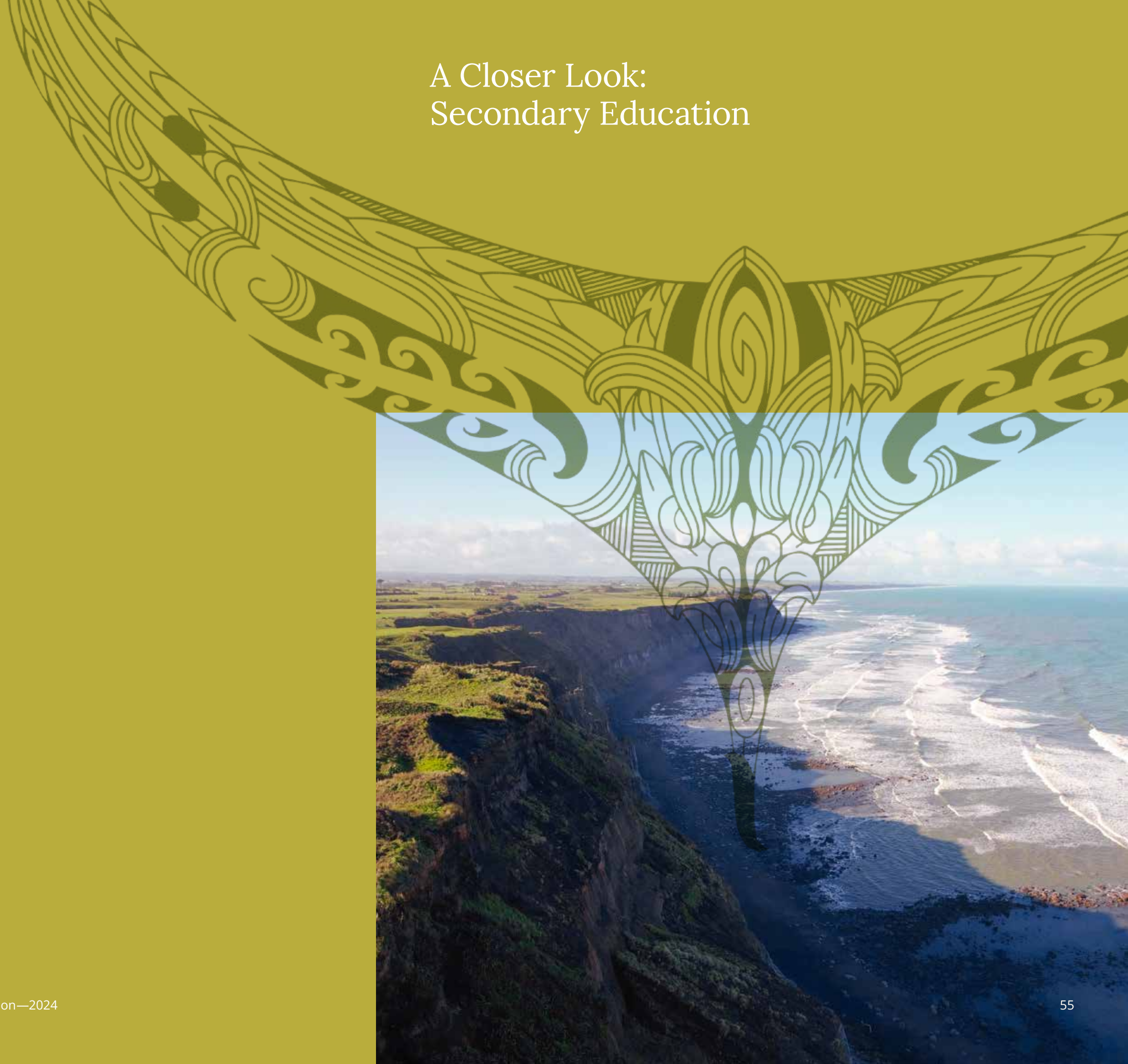


NZ Police Annual Report, 2021.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE STANDS AS THE LEADING CAUSE OF FEMALE HOMICIDE DEATHS AND REMAINS THE MOST PREVALENT FORM OF VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN.

Professor Julia Gerrard / Dr Ian Lambie, Every 4 Minutes: A discussion paper on preventing family violence in New Zealand, Office of the Prime Minister, 2018.

A Closer Look: Secondary Education



To pave the way for meaningful action, we must first gain a deeper understanding of the concerns that hinder our progress toward equity and wellbeing. “A Closer Look” is dedicated to this goal by delving into the complex community concern of secondary education. We approach this topic from systemic, national, and local perspectives, using quantitative data, national research, and community narratives to identify concerns and barriers, as well as potential strengths and opportunities within the landscape. By doing so, our aim is to pinpoint areas that need attention to reduce disparities in secondary education and improve outcomes for all.

While many insights in this report directly relate to secondary education, others may have more indirect connections. This underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to complex community issues—one that considers both immediate factors and the broader ecosystem influencing the topic. For a deeper understanding of the interconnected elements related to secondary education, please refer to the Secondary Education Ecosystem on page 62.

What’s in this Section:

- Problem Statement: This foundational summary, serving as the cornerstone of our exploration, outlines the secondary education landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand. It sets the scene for the report and helps the reader grasp the intricacies of the issue.

- Framework Alignment: In this section, we revisit the Impact Collective Framework and how the topic of secondary education aligns with global, national, and local frameworks, demonstrating its wider impact on equity and wellbeing.
- System Map: This visual representation captures the complex ecosystem of secondary education. This tool is instrumental in capturing the web of factors that influence and are influenced by the topic.
- National Context: Drawing from national research, literature, and media reports, this section situates our findings within the broader context of Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Local Context: Anchored in lived experiences, this section captures the secondary education landscape from the community’s perspective, translating findings into relatable human stories.

Problem Statement

Aotearoa New Zealand’s secondary education system faces multiple challenges that hinder equitable student outcomes. Socioeconomic disparities remain a significant barrier, with students from low-socioeconomic schools, particularly Māori and Pasifika students, who are disproportionately represented in these schools, achieving lower outcomes compared to their peers in more affluent communities. This is often due to limited access to high-quality resources, experienced teachers, and diverse learning opportunities.

Declining attendance rates and growing mental health concerns further exacerbate these issues, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted learning and increased disengagement. Gender disparities, bullying, and a lack of career guidance also hinder student success, while inadequate parental involvement and limited support for struggling students intensify educational inequities across the board. Together, these factors contribute to an environment where too many students are left without the skills, confidence, or motivation to succeed academically or transition effectively into tertiary and/or employment pathways.

Addressing these systemic issues has the potential to transform secondary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Improving access to resources and providing targeted support for low-decile schools could significantly reduce the achievement gap, while culturally responsive teaching practices would promote inclusivity and engagement for students from diverse backgrounds. Improved mental health resources, strengthened teacher-student relationships, and strategies to boost attendance could create safer, more supportive learning environments. Additionally, by continuing the growing integration of vocational training and career guidance into the curriculum, schools can better prepare students for diverse pathways beyond secondary education.

Ultimately, by tackling these challenges, Aotearoa New Zealand could build a more equitable education system, empowering students to thrive academically, socially, and economically while fostering a skilled and adaptable workforce for the future.

Framework Alignment

In this section, we circle back to the Impact Collective Framework, an essential tool that ties together global, national, and local perspectives through the lenses of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Living Standards Framework, and Whānau Ora Goals. This framework enables us to systematically assess how secondary education touches on critical areas of the human experience, highlighting its extensive impact on equity and wellbeing at various levels.

The visual representation provided (see figure 6) is designed to clearly illustrate the various touchpoints of secondary education across global, national, and local contexts. These encompass Sustainable Development Goals, such as Quality Education, Reduced Inequalities, Decent Work and Economic Growth and Sustainable Cities and Communities.

- To navigate the visual representation effectively:
- Full-coloured segments indicate areas most influenced by secondary education, highlighting where it has significant influence in equity and wellbeing.
 - Half-coloured segments highlight areas partially influenced by secondary education, suggesting a moderate influence on equity and wellbeing.
 - Grey segments represent areas not directly influenced by secondary education, highlighting its limited influence.

This framework alignment not only highlights the multidimensional nature of secondary education in Aotearoa New Zealand but also showcases how addressing this topic has the potential of positively impacting diverse aspects of equity and wellbeing.



Figure 6 - Impact Collective Equity and Wellbeing Framework: The Influence Secondary Education has on Equity and Wellbeing.

Understanding the Secondary Education Ecosystem

Community System Map

Before diving into the Secondary Education Ecosystem, let's first examine the landscape of interconnected social issues as shown in the Community System Map from previous Equity and Wellbeing profiles. These maps showcase the complex interplay between themes such as employment, education, and crime, demonstrating their impact on specific communities, such as the South Taranaki district (see Figure 7).

The Community Systems Map not only highlights the complexity of and relationships between these themes but also sets the stage for a more focused exploration surrounding secondary education. For a detailed view of the Community System Map, refer to the 'Snapshot of the Community' section within our Equity and Wellbeing Profiles.

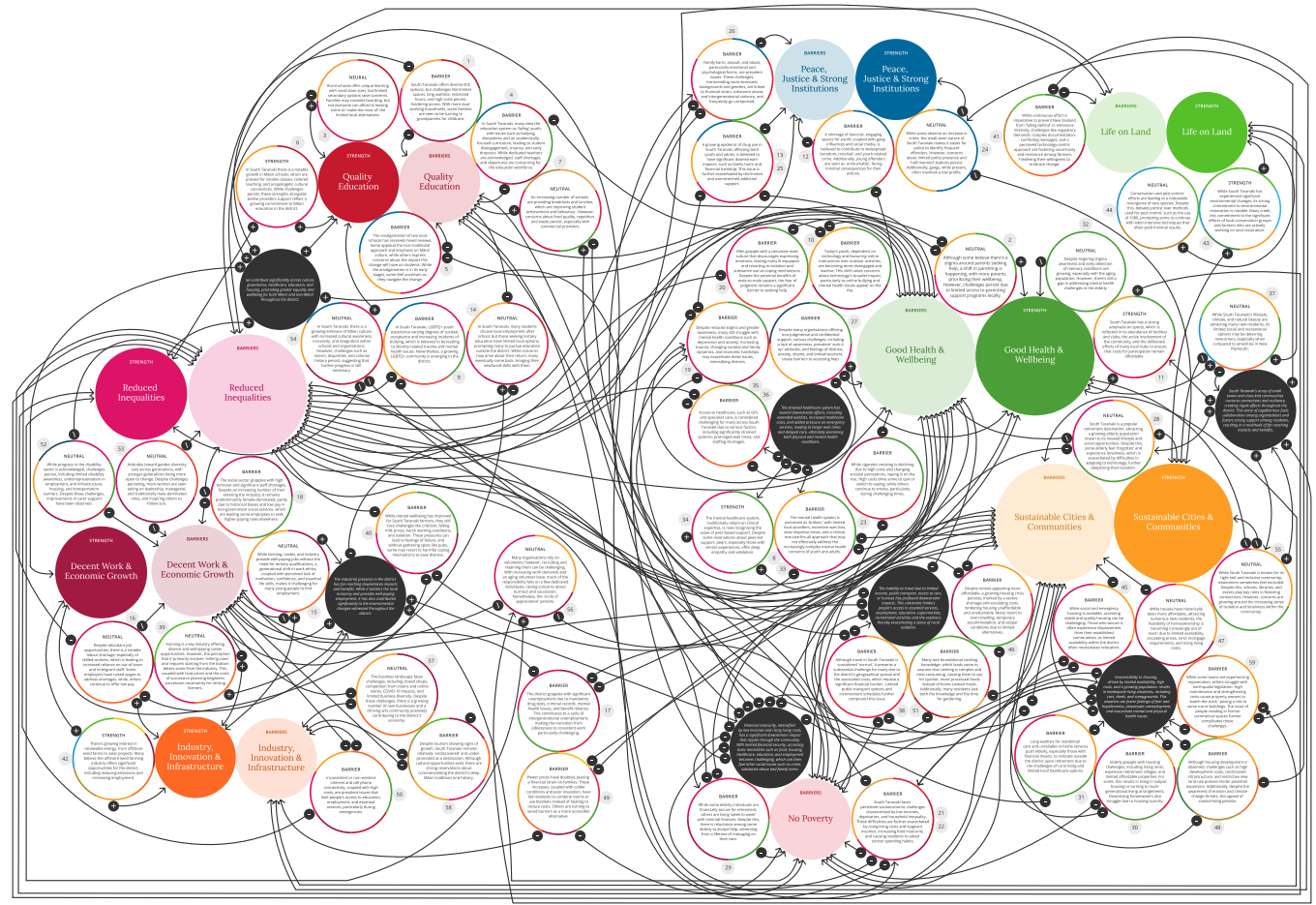


Figure 7 - Example of Community Systems Map: South Taranaki District.

As we shift our focus from the broader landscape captured by the Community System Map, we zoom in on the topic of secondary education (see figure 8). This closer perspective allows us to uncover the specific themes, and their relationships, that uniquely contribute to this concern.

On the next page, there's a visual representation called the secondary education Ecosystem (see figure 9). This visualisation combines findings from both local and national levels to illustrate the complex interactions of causes, effects, and influences related to secondary education. It provides an overview of the factors impacting secondary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Further details on many aspects of this map will be discussed in the subsequent sections of the report.

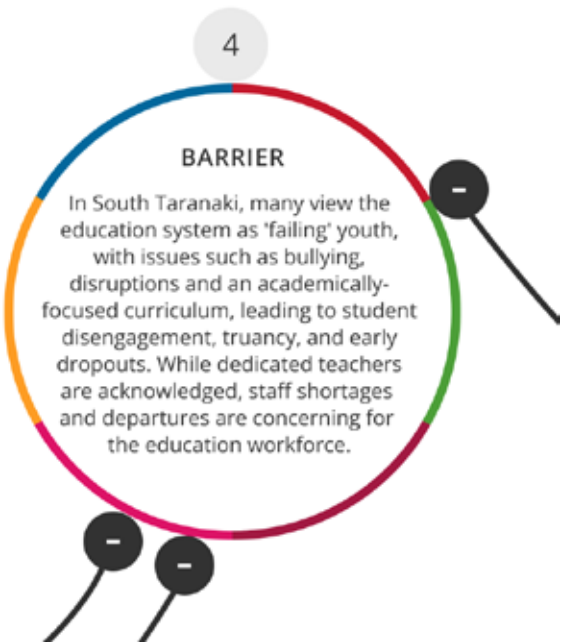


Figure 8 - Example of Community Systems Map: Focusing on secondary education in South Taranaki.

Secondary Education Ecosystem

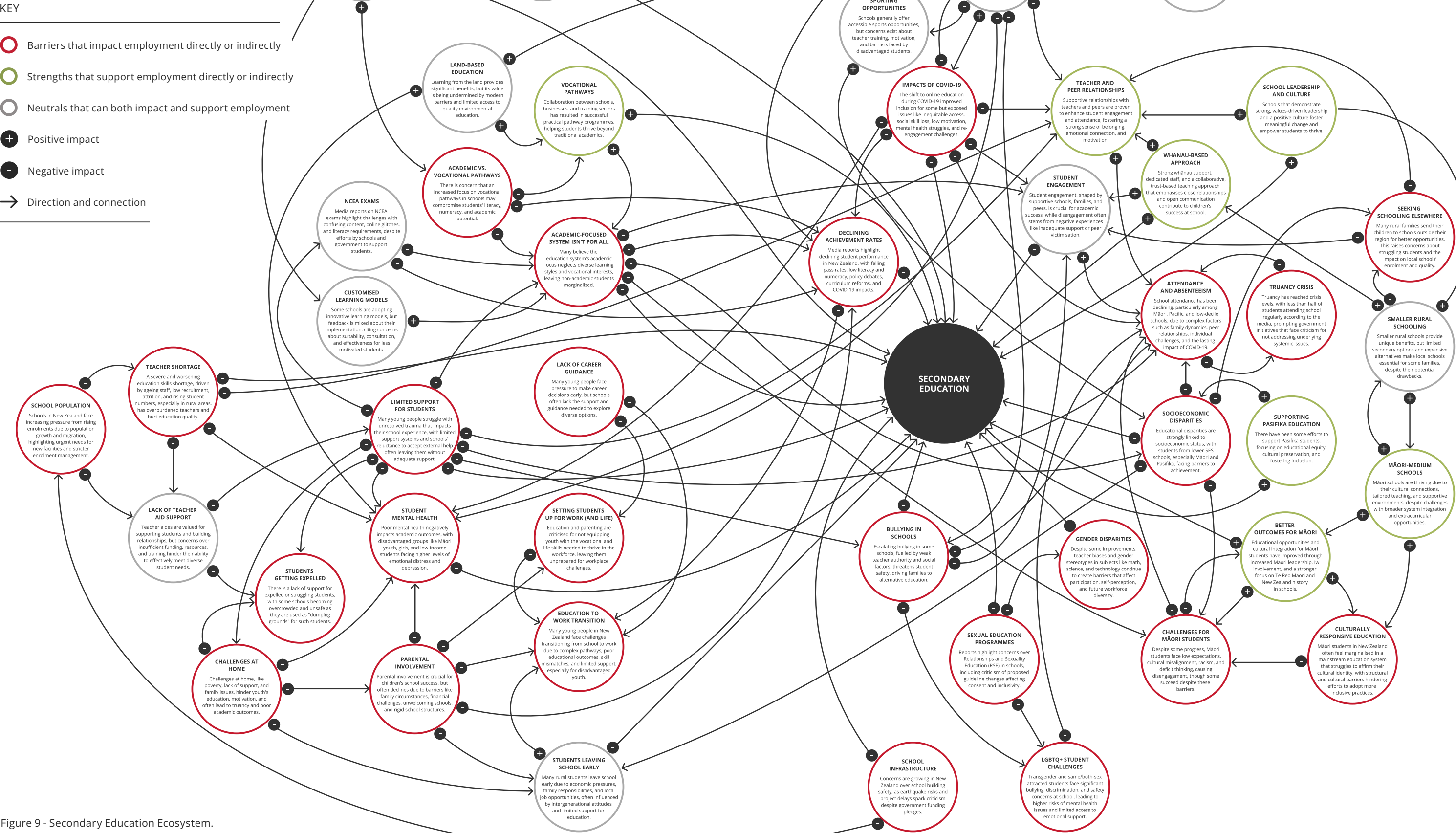


Figure 9 - Secondary Education Ecosystem.

National Context

National Literature Review

In this section, we examine a diverse array of research materials, including scholarly articles, meta-analyses, theses, reports, discussion papers, and book chapters, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the secondary education landscape from a national perspective. Each source provides unique insights and evidence, enriching our understanding of the factors influencing secondary education across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Please note that while we examine a diverse array of materials, this review captures high-level research and is not intended to be a comprehensive study. Instead, it aims to build on subsequent sections of this report and provide additional perspectives and considerations relevant to secondary education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Socioeconomic Disparities

Aotearoa New Zealand faces persistent and substantial disparities in student achievement, which are strongly linked to socioeconomic status (SES). Research highlights that poverty and socioeconomic hardship significantly affect educational outcomes, with students from lower-SES backgrounds consistently achieving at lower levels than their peers from more affluent communities (Bolton, 2017; Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016).

The socioeconomic status of schools also influence these disparities. Despite long standing initiatives to support these, achievement gaps between high- and low-SES schools remain wide. Research states this is linked to students in low-decile schools often facing unequal opportunities to learn, characterised by less challenging texts, highly structured and teacher-directed learning, and simplified resources, all of which limit students' preparation for academic assessments and overall achievement (Haug, Purwin, & Santiago, 2024; Peterson et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2009; Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016).

While students from all backgrounds may experience the effects of these inequities, Māori and Pasifika students are particularly affected, as they are disproportionately represented in low-decile schools (Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016; Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016).

“Achievement gaps often can stem from inequality of opportunity, where students from minority or low socio-economic backgrounds do not have access to an education that is on par with their peers.” (Bolton, 2017, p. 7).

“Research shows that systemic disadvantages for children living in poverty lead to lower educational outcomes. Poverty is linked with high rates of mobility, where students move and change schools multiple times in one school year” (Bolton, 2017, p. 18).

“...there is ample evidence of disparity in student achievement among secondary school students in New Zealand related to SES” (Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016, p. 19).

“...previous research which has found that middle class New Zealand students tend to achieve at higher levels than those from poorer communities... Unfortunately, most Māori are located in lower decile schools and therefore cannot always take advantage of the benefits that being in a middle class school can bring” (Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016, p. 29).

“...there is a persistent gap in achievement between students in low socio-economic status (SES) schools in which there is an over-representation of Maori and Pasifika students, and students in more affluent communities” (Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016, p. 1).

“At secondary level, there is a large variation in the percentage of students from different socio-economic groups gaining level 2 NCEA qualifications. In 2007, only 48% of students from decile 1–2 schools achieved this level of qualification, compared with over 80% of students from decile 9–10 schools” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 56).

“In four out of the five final multilevel models, students in higher socioeconomic schools tended to earn higher end-of-year achievement scores than students in lower socioeconomic schools. This finding is consistent with national trends showing that high socio-economic schools tend to have higher achieving students than low socioeconomic schools” (Peterson et al., 2016, p. 137).

“Achievement rates differed vastly between high and low deciles, with a mere 12% of secondary children in decile 1-schools meeting the standard in English writing, whereas 59% met the standards in decile 10 schools” (Haugh, Purwin, & Santiago, 2024, p. 8).

“...students in higher SES schools tended to perform better on end-of-year mathematics and reading achievement tests than students in lower SES schools” (Peterson et al., 2016, p. 130).

“At the systems level, even the basic OTL [Opportunities to Learn] in terms being able to participate, i.e., be exposed to the assessed curriculum, was limited by students’ ethnicity and their schools’ SES” (Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016, p. 19).

“...students in lower SES schools were provided with limited learning opportunities, characterised by highly structured and teacher-directed learning experiences and short texts targeted at youth rather than adult readers (Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016, p. 19).

“The instruction (including the textual resources) in the lowest SES schools tended to involve shorter and simpler texts, that is texts that were less academically challenging. There was evidence of more scaffolding and teacher ‘assistance’ with more frequent use of itemised task sheets rather than literary or other authentic texts. Discourse patterns tended to be different too, with students in the lowest SES schools engaging less often in extended dialogue and with fewer occasions for direct teacher input” (Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016, p. 19).

“The gap between the length and style of texts to which students were exposed in the classroom and the longer, more sophisticated texts to which they were expected to respond in the end-of-year assessment for the reading standards provides one stark illustration of the limited and at times absent OTL afforded these students” (Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016, p. 19).

“New Zealand has long allocated equity funding to schools based on the socio-economic status of the area in which the school operates through the equity grant, and then from 1995 the decile system and since 2023 the Equity Index. Nevertheless, gaps in student performance between different socio-economic and ethnic groups, as well as between girls and boys, remain wide” (Haugh et al., 2024, p. 8).

Educational Outcomes for Māori

Despite some progress, such as a narrowing achievement gap for Māori students and the establishment of Māori-medium schools alongside decades of educational reform, significant educational disparities persist for Māori students in mainstream education in Aotearoa New Zealand. These students continue to experience poorer academic outcomes than their non-Māori peers, including lower achievement and attendance rates, higher absenteeism, increased suspension rates, lower university entrance rates and over-representation in special education and lower-stream classes (Bishop et al., 2009; Bolton, 2017; Henderson, 2013; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006).

While some studies indicate socioeconomic disadvantage as a contributing factor to the achievement gap, research primarily points to a pervasive culture of deficit thinking and implicit bias among educators, which reinforces disproportionately low expectations for Māori students. This deficit mindset wrongly attributes underachievement to perceived shortcomings in students’ cultural, familial, or personal circumstances, rather than systemic or institutional shortcomings. Such beliefs negatively affect classroom interactions, limit learning opportunities, and perpetuate a self-fulfilling cycle of underachievement and poor outcomes for Māori students (Bishop, 2003; Haugh, Purwin, & Santiago, 2024; Peterson et al., 2016; Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006; Turner et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Māori students are capable of achieving highly, even in these challenging circumstances (Peterson et al., 2016).

“When asked about the achievement gap, all 10 teachers again referred to perceived deficits in Māori and Pasifika home backgrounds, and students’ attitudes as contributing factors” (Turner et al., 2015, p. 1).

“Despite the choice provided by Maori medium education in New Zealand, and decades of educational reforms and policies such as Multiculturalism and Biculturalism that have sought to address these educational disparities, for the large proportion of Maori students (over 90%; Ministry of Education, 2002) who attend mainstream schools, there has been little if any shift in these disparities since they were first statistically identified over 40 years ago” (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 2).

“In comparison to majority culture students (in New Zealand these students are primarily of European descent): the overall academic achievement levels of Māori students is low; their rate of suspension from school is three times higher; they are over-represented in special education programmes for behavioral issues; enrol in pre-school programs in lower proportions than other groups; tend to be over-represented in low stream education classes; are more likely than other students to be found in vocational curriculum streams; leave school earlier with less formal qualifications and enrol in tertiary education in lower proportions” (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 1).

“Māori... students in New Zealand are also more likely to have low school attendance rates. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing at least ten per cent of the school year for any reason, is shown to have negative correlation with school success. In 2016, Pākehā students had a 70.5 per cent rate of regular school attendance, compared with 54.7 per cent for Māori students” (Bolton, 2017, p. 18).

“...the inequitable nature of the education system performance for Māori learners. Barriers includes: Low inclusion of Māori themes and topics in English-medium education, fewer teacher-student interactions, less positive feedback, more negative comments targeted to Māori learners, under-assessment of capability, widespread targeting of Māori learners with ineffective or even counterproductive teaching strategies (such as the ‘learning styles’ approach), failure to uphold mana Māori in education, inadvertent teacher racism, peer racism, mispronounced names and so on” (Henderson, 2013, p. 11).

“Māori students gained on average 56 points on their standardized mathematics achievement test whereas Pākehā students gained a mean of 40 points. This larger increase in achievement by Māori students may be indicative of the trend found in recent years in high schools in New Zealand, whereby Māori students do appear to be closing the achievement gap with Pākehā students” (Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016, p. 27).

“...the most pervasive explanation for the under achievement of Māori students was that they are the victims of pathological lifestyles that hinder their chances of benefiting from schooling” (Bishop et al., 2009, p. 3).

“Eight out of 10 teachers interviewed believed there were deficits in Māori and Pasifika students’ home backgrounds and that they lacked goals, motivation and aspirations” (Turner et al., 2015, p. 1).

“...teachers’ explicit ethnic attitudes were unassociated with student achievement. In contrast, teachers’ general implicit ethnic attitudes correlated with student achievements such that classrooms with teachers who had high levels of implicit prejudice had larger ethnic-based achievement gaps than classrooms with teachers who had low levels of implicit prejudice” (Peterson et al., 2016, p. 126).

“...examples of deficit thinking are that students from low-income families or minority cultures have lower intelligence, lack motivation, suffer from inadequate socialisation, and have poor linguistic development” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 75).

“Māori children sometimes face additional barriers to learning, such as lower expectations from teachers or fewer teacher-student interactions” (Haugh, Purwin, & Santiago, 2024, p. 8).

“Teachers had expectations for Māori students’ achievement in reading that were below their expectations for other ethnic groups. This was despite the finding that Māori students’ performance was not below that of any other ethnic group at the beginning of the year” (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006, p. 439).

“While high teacher expectations have positive effects on student achievement, low teacher expectations are acknowledged as one factor that contributes to student failure. Moreover, ethnicity is a critical contributor to teacher expectations... with expectations lower and more negative for indigenous and minority group students than they are for White students” (Turner et al., 2015).

“Findings revealed that teachers’ expectations differed depending on the ethnicity of the student, even when controlling for achievement. Expectations were highest for Asian and Pākehā students, and lowest for Pasifika and Māori” (Turner et al., 2015).

“...it appeared that teachers’ expectations were high for all groups other than Māori and that this was not based on student achievement” (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006, p. 439).

“...with education, theorists tend to identify ‘cultural deficiency’ explanations for the non-participation by Māori in education... These theories collectively can be labelled ‘deficit theories’, in that they blame the victims and see the locus of the problem as either lack of inherent ability, lack of cultural appropriateness or limited resources; in short, some deficiency at best, a ‘pathology’ at worst” (Bishop, 2003, p. 222, 223).

“According to Bishop et al. (2003), deficit thinking by teachers impedes Māori students’ capacity to thrive within the education system (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 75).

“It is important to note that studies have consistently found that teachers interact less positively with students they had low expectations of... Consequently, the lack of positive interactions between students and teachers makes students feel unworthy and incapable of achieving and decreases their self-esteem” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 75).

“When teachers have such beliefs about particular ethnic groups, this may result in lowered expectations for particular groups of students. There is evidence that when this occurs teachers may alter their teaching practices and thus student opportunity to learn” (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006, p. 440).

“Research indicates that teachers’ negative beliefs and low expectations of students’ academic abilities influence their interactions with the students, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy that thwarts academic achievement and consequently perpetuates further inequality” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 84).

“...it is relevant to note that in this study 20% of Māori students achieved at an above-average level in mathematics. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that Māori students are capable of achieving highly, regardless of the school they attend and in spite of low teacher expectations overall for Māori” (Peterson et al., 2016, p. 11).

Culturally Responsive Education

Research states that Māori students in Aotearoa New Zealand remain underserved by a mainstream education system that often fails to affirm their cultural identities, values, and lived experiences. This lack of cultural responsiveness can lead to feelings of marginalisation and alienation, as Māori students fail to see their culture, language, or knowledge reflected in the curriculum (Robinson et al., 2009; Henderson, 2013; Glynn et al., 2010). Although culturally responsive pedagogies have been promoted to address these disparities, structural barriers persist. For many mainstream teachers, whose practices are shaped by majority cultural values, adopting culturally responsive approaches presents challenges (Robinson et al., 2009). Without deeper engagement with Aotearoa’s bicultural heritage, entrenched biases risk persisting (Henderson, 2013).

“...the reported underachievement of Māori students in New Zealand is being understood as an outcome of classroom pedagogies that do not respond to Māori cultural identities and lived experiences” (Glynn et al., 2010, p. 119).

“...although there is an improvement in Māori student achievement, significant numbers of Māori students are still under-served by the education system in New Zealand, with a disproportionate amount leaving the schooling system without the qualifications they need” (Henderson, 2013, p. 10).

“This influence has been strong in New Zealand where, from a culturalist position, the Ministry of Education [MOE] has encouraged educators to address the educational underachievement of Māori students through identity affirming culturally responsive pedagogical initiatives” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 2).

“...the inequitable nature of the education system performance for Māori learners. Barriers includes: Low inclusion of Māori themes and topics in English-medium education, fewer teacher-student interactions, less positive feedback, more negative comments targeted to Māori learners, under-assessment of capability, widespread targeting of Māori learners with ineffective or even counterproductive teaching strategies (such as the ‘learning styles’ approach), failure to uphold mana Māori in education, inadvertent teacher racism, peer racism, mispronounced names and so on” (Henderson, 2013, p. 11).

“The corresponding challenge for educational leaders in English-medium schools is to support Māori students to achieve as Māori” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 60).

“When students continually find little or no evidence of their culture being reflected in the curriculum and pedagogy of the classroom and school, and find that the knowledge they do have is never called upon, there is a concern that they might experience the classroom and school as alien, uncaring and unsafe places, where they do not belong, and for these feelings to be reflected in their challenging or disruptive behaviour, and truancy” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 119).

“...although the language, knowledge and cultural backgrounds of Māori students are just as rich as those of Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent), and just as truly belong in this country, they are seldom affirmed or incorporated into the culture of teaching and learning within mainstream classrooms” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 118).

“These cultural relationships-based learning strategies can present major challenges to mainstream teachers whose teaching embodies the majority culture values of individual competition and individual achievement, and who assess student learning solely in terms of these values” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 120).

“No matter how adept in their discipline a professional is, or how well they implement teaching and learning tools, without involvement in the dual cultural heritage of this land, they will not see the cultural differences, far less bridge them to form healthy, effective relationships with Māori learners and whānau” (Henderson, 2013, p. 11).

Gender Disparities

Research shows that female educational achievement in Aotearoa New Zealand has increased significantly, leading some to conclude that females are no longer disadvantaged in educational outcomes (Gibb & Fergusson, 2009). Girls consistently outperform boys in reading and writing and perform roughly on par with boys in mathematics and science (Haugh, Purwin, & Santiago, 2024; Easton, 2013). However, teacher expectations and biases, particularly in mathematics and science, often favour boys, and continue to create barriers for girls (Watson et al., 2016). Gender stereotypes are also evident in technology subjects, with boys underrepresented in areas like fashion, and girls in computer science and material learning (Zanchi & Watson, 2024). These varied expectations, and stereotypes can affect how students see themselves and their abilities, making them less interested in these subjects and potentially limiting opportunities for a diverse workforce in the future (Zanchi & Watson, 2024; Watson et al., 2016).

“The gender stereotypes reinforced by this trend of underrepresentation could hinder students’ identification with technology subjects and negatively affect their interest in taking these subjects (Zanchi & Watson, 2024, p. 252).

“During the last twenty years, female educational achievement has increased considerably in most Western countries, including New Zealand (Gibb & Fergusson, 2009, p. 1).

“These trends have led many to conclude that females are no longer disadvantaged in educational achievement, and in fact, the disadvantaged gender group now appears to be males (Gibb & Fergusson, 2009, p. 1).

“...teachers’ tendency to overrate boys’ mathematics capabilities, higher expectations of boys’ mathematics achievement, and more positive attitudes towards boys than girls in mathematics have been associated with the gendering of mathematics as a masculine content domain” (Watson et al., 2016, p. 84).

“Gender gaps in student performance are manifest, albeit roughly on par with the OECD average.

Girls significantly outperform boys in reading although the difference has narrowed since 2012, mainly owing to girls’ declining performance. In mathematics, a higher share of top performers pushes boys’ average scores above that of girls. In science, girls and boys are roughly equal, even if the distribution of outcomes is wider for boys. The share of girls attaining university entrance has been consistently over ten percentage points higher than boys’ over the past decade” (Haugh, Purwin, & Santiago, 2024, p. 9).

“There are large differences in scores in reading achievement by gender, with girls having a markedly higher achievement than boys. This is not peculiar to New Zealand but reflects OECD outcomes generally. As in the rest of the OECD, boys score a little higher in mathematics while the science literacy scores are about the same (Easton, 2013, p. 4).

“...there is a consistent male–female divide within technology education in secondary schools, resulting in an ongoing underrepresentation of male students in fashion and textiles and female students in computer science and resistant materials learning areas (Zanchi & Watson, 2024, p. 251).

“This underrepresentation is concerning as it contradicts the inclusion promoted in the New Zealand Curriculum and may contribute to reduced opportunities for a talented and diverse workforce (Zanchi & Watson, 2024, p. 251).

“However, it is often claimed that within the general trend of female educational advantage there remain pockets of female educational disadvantage, particularly in mathematics and science (Gibb & Fergusson, 2009, p. 1).

“...teachers’ stereotypical beliefs about mathematics have been related to student perception of personal ability in that domain...” (Watson et al., 2016, p. 84).

“...teacher expectations based on stereotypical gender beliefs have the potential to become self-fulfilling prophecies for students, founded on inaccuracies and promoting inequity” (Watson et al., 2016, p. 84).

“...the authors specifically identify New Zealand as an example of a country where stereotypical gender beliefs concerning the lower ability of girls in mathematics are still likely to exist, and claim that this corresponds to a gender achievement gap (albeit reduced) that disadvantages girls in mathematics” (Watson et al., 2016, p. 85).

COVID-19 Impact

Research shows that when schools temporarily closed across Aotearoa New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, teachers had to quickly switch to online learning, a shift that brought significant challenges. Many teachers, unprepared and lacking confidence with digital tools and online teaching methods, struggled to meet the different needs of their students, especially those with disabilities, while also dealing with heavier workloads (Flack et al., 2020; Thornton, 2021). Although the Ministry of Education provided devices to support this transition, reliable internet and technology were ongoing issues. These barriers were worse for students in rural areas, low-income families, and indigenous communities, making existing inequalities for marginalised groups even greater (Flack et al., 2020; Thornton, 2021; Yates et al., 2020).

Research indicates that during this time, schools focused on the wellbeing of both students and teachers over academic performance, knowing that the pandemic was taking a toll on mental health. Even with this focus, students faced big learning challenges. Without the structure of school routines and the in-person support of teachers and classmates, many found it hard to stay motivated. Family responsibilities and distractions at home added to the difficulties (Yates et al., 2020; Flack et al., 2020). While some students liked the flexibility of online learning, most preferred the collaborative environment of the classroom, where they could work with others, get immediate feedback, and easily ask for help (Yates et al., 2020).

“Respondents also expressed particular concerns about using digital pedagogies with students with disabilities or students learning English as a new language” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 20).

“New Zealand schools, like those in many other countries, closed for a period of time in 2020 as a result of a national lockdown. The New Zealand lockdown was shorter than for many countries, with most schools being completely closed for between seven and nine weeks; however, principals still faced multiple challenges and had to adapt their leadership approaches” (Thornton, 2021, p. 392).

“Their responses revealed a profession under extraordinary pressure – dealing with unfamiliar technologies and teaching methods; struggling with additional demands for preparation; worrying about the lack of social contact with students and colleagues; and, fearing for the educational and psychological welfare of students, particularly those in early primary school” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 3).

“New Zealand’s government mandated the closure of all schools in late March, bringing the school holidays forward and requiring approximately 800,000 students to transition to distance learning on 15 April” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 4).

“Staff capacity for teaching online was also a challenge for a number of principals. Typically there was a ‘continuum from those for whom that would have been a very scary prospect if I’d suddenly said you know you must do this online learning to those who were highly competent and for whom this was an easy move” (Thornton, 2021).

“We asked educators how confident they felt in their school’s ability to support students’ online learning... 42% of educators from New Zealand reported being only “somewhat confident” or “not at all confident” in their school’s ability to meet students’ learning needs online” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 14).

“While some participants believed their staff were already quite confident, for others, lockdown provided a great opportunity to significantly shift staff practices” (Thornton, 2021).

“The transition to online learning has increased my marking load exponentially and it has been exhausting, trying to stay on top of preparation whilst also managing the admin of providing students with feedback” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 26).

“A major challenge was ensuring students had access to devices and the internet so that they could learn online, and all but one principal mentioned lending out devices to students in advance of lockdown” (Thornton, 2021, p. 398).

“Shifting to distance learning requires ready access to devices and reliable internet access... Educators were concerned about students’ access to technological devices and a reliable internet connection... 43% of respondents in New Zealand chose “access to technology/internet” as one of their top three concerns about the transition to distance teaching and learning” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 19).

“...educators also were concerned that multiple children and even parents would have to share one device, limiting the amount of time that students could spend in the digital learning environment or reaching out for extra assistance” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 19).

“Educators’ concerns about distance learning’s effects on educational inequality reached beyond concerns about access to technology in the home. Respondents were particularly concerned about rural, low-income and indigenous students. Educators have cause for concern, as research indicates that distance learning may exacerbate existing inequality and fractured relationships between the government and already marginalised groups” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 20).

“The Ministry of Education had offered to provide devices or hard-copy learning materials so that all students could learn from home; however, there were problems with distributing these, which had implications for some schools” (Thornton, 2021, p. 398).

“The New Zealand Ministry of Education supported this by... trying to ensure all students, and in particular those in their final years of schooling, had internet access and a device for learning” (Yates et al., 2020, p. 1).

“When asked about the hardest part of learning at home, 39% cited ‘motivation’. This lack of motivation was linked to contextual issues which included: family obligations, e.g. looking after siblings or helping out at home or on the farm; distractions like Netflix or online shopping; inaccessibility of teacher or peer help; lack of extrinsic consequences; and the lack of distinction between home and school” (Yates et al., 2020, p. 12).

“Without the extrinsic drivers of school, routine, consequences, resources and easy access to teacher and peer support, many students reported being unable to find the intrinsic motivation to study” (Yates et al., 2020, p. 12).

“Some recognised that lack of time management affected their motivation and learning and attributed this to ‘not having the routine of school, e.g. getting up early, having bell times and specified breaks’” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 9).

“...only a minority (10%) preferred learning at home, the place of choice was school, but with more control over the use of time. Those who preferred home commented that school is stressful, has too many distractions such as disruptive students or they experienced bullying” (Yates et al., 2020, p. 8).

“Students were asked to compare their experience of collaborating online at home with collaborating at school and most (53%) preferred the familiarity of collaborating in class” (Yates et al., 2020, p. 10).

“Key reasons for preferring in-class collaborative conversations were proximity to others (teachers and peers) and immediacy of support. Help is more accessible in class ‘because you can just turn to your neighbour’ and get an immediate answer and it was easier to attract the teacher’s attention, whereas at home they had to find convenient times to message peers and teachers and wait for responses” (Yates et al., 2020, p. 11).

“The prioritisation of wellbeing over learning over the time New Zealand schools were in lockdown was a feature of all the interviews with the principals, who demonstrated empathy for both students and staff. This emphasis on wellbeing reflected the concern expressed by principals for the health and safety of vulnerable students... Empathy was shown in multiple ways, from the messages principals sent to their school communities to the expectations of the teachers and students regarding online learning” (Thornton, 2021, p. 399).

Student Engagement

Student engagement is essential to academic success as it connects students to positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes and serves as a primary model for understanding dropout prevention and school completion. Research consistently shows that engagement is a dynamic, multidimensional construct, shaped not by students alone but by the supportive capacity of schools, families, and peers (Christenson et al., 2012; Zepke et al., 2010).

Conversely, disengagement often arises from negative experiences, such as inadequate support from teachers or peer victimisation. When students feel unsupported, misunderstood, or unfairly treated by teachers, they are more likely to become disengaged. Similarly, peer relationships that involve bullying or exclusion significantly diminish students’ comfort and sense of connection within school, contributing to absenteeism and reduced enthusiasm for learning (Bruce, 2018; Christenson et al., 2012; Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023).

“Nearly one third of secondary school students report decreased engagement in school during their teen years. When considering the emotional or psychological aspects of engagement, which are routinely associated with high-risk behaviors, a student must somehow conclude that, at a minimum, at least one specific person at their school truly cares about him or her not only as a student, but as a person” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 563).

“Student engagement, irrespective of the specificity of its definition, is generally associated positively with desired academic, social, and emotional learning outcomes” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 5).

“Student engagement is considered the primary theoretical model for understanding dropout and promoting school completion, defined as graduation from high school with sufficient academic and social skills to partake in postsecondary educational options and/or the world of work” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 5).

“...academic engagement increased the odds of graduating from high school by 69%...” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 121).

“Engagement is a multidimensional construct – one that requires an understanding of affective connections within the academic environment (e.g., positive adult-student and peer relationships) and active student behavior” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 5).

“The role of context cannot be ignored. Engagement is not conceptualized as an attribute of the student but rather as an alterable state of being that is highly influenced by the capacity of school, family, and peers to provide consistent expectations and supports for learning... In short, both the individual and context matter” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 6).

“More than 90 percent of all respondents thought teacher influence had high importance for their engagement” (Zepke et al., 2010, p. 8).

“It can be argued that teachers play an important part in establishing culturally safe environments for students and that their attitudes and behaviours therefore will be considered a very important influence on student engagement” (Zepke et al., 2010, p. 13).

“Students who received optimal levels of teacher support were more likely to be engaged than were students receiving low levels of teacher support” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 205).

“A lack of support with learning was identified as the most prevalent sub-theme that affected how students felt about their teachers. Baskerville and Loveridge (2020), state that students have a strong emotional response when they feel inadequately supported in class. Again, when students do not feel supported with their learning, they feel they are being unfairly treated” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 84).

“...where young people were unable to access wider school support, they were also more likely to disengage” (Bruce, 2018, p. 28).

“...the most prevalent learning factor that young people in this study discussed was their need for help by teachers in classroom learning. Most young people spoke at length about the ways in which they became either engaged or disengaged in learning, and the key factor was the extent to which the teacher helped them” (Bruce, 2018, p. 30).

Attendance and Absenteeism

Aotearoa New Zealand has been experiencing a decline in school attendance, which has consistently been lower than in comparable countries and continues to fall post-COVID-19. While attendance rates have dropped across all school types and ethnicities, the most significant declines are seen in low-decile schools and among Māori and Pasifika learners (Education Review Office, 2023; Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023).

Research also states that absenteeism is a complex and multifaceted issue, influenced by family dynamics, peer relationships, systemic and institutional barriers, and individual circumstances. Key factors include students' beliefs about the importance of school, parental comfort with absences, systemic issues such as deficit thinking and negative stereotyping (notably impacting Māori students) teacher-student relationships, disinterest in the curriculum, a lack of positive peer connections or experiences of bullying, as well as challenging home environments, mental health concerns, and the effects of COVID-19—all of which affect students' willingness and ability to attend school (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023; Education Review Office, 2023).

“The over-representation of Māori students in the absenteeism statistics is of significant concern. According to Bishop et al. (2003), deficit thinking by teachers impedes Māori students' capacity to thrive within the education system.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 75)

“Our attendance is lower than other comparable countries and attendance levels have been falling since 2015. This drop was evident before the Covid-19 pandemic, and attendance continues to fall.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 2)

“Since the global COVID-19 pandemic, with the government closing schools during lockdowns, absenteeism has reached epidemic proportions as students have failed to return to school.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 73)

“Aotearoa New Zealand has consistently had lower attendance than other countries. The Covid-19 pandemic has further reduced attendance.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 3)

“Declining attendance is seen across all school types and for all ethnicities. The drop has been steepest in low decile schools, and for Māori and Pacific learners.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 3)

“Attendance data shows that, in term 2 of 2021, only 59.7% of all students attended school regularly (MoE, 2022). Concerningly, Māori and Pacific children accounted for the most significant decreases in regular attendance. Only 44.4 % of Māori and 44.8 % of Pacific students attended school regularly in term 2 of 2021 (MoE, 2022).” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

“...the most significant decline in attendance occurred in the country's poorest regions.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

“...deficit thinking is often closely linked with racism. Bishop and Berryman (2006) report that when Māori student experience negative stereotyping from their teachers, they “voted with their feet” (p. 255) and absented themselves from class.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 84)

“Many underlying factors influence absenteeism, including teacher/student relationships, the school environment, peer relationships, curriculum and pedagogy, and family and personal well-being.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 73)

“...the reasons for students' non-attendance at school are complex and multi-factorial.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 84)

“For learners, we found that the biggest driver of attendance is how important they think going to school every day is. Learners who think going to school every day is important are 23 percentage points more likely to attend regularly than those who don't (60 percent compared to 37 percent).” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 6)

“Not being interested in what is taught is a big driver of non-attendance, along with not liking at least one teacher and not liking the people in class.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 9)

“Learners who are interested in schoolwork and activities at school are more likely to attend.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 9)

“Secondary learners who want to miss school because they don't like the people in their class are 20 percentage points less likely to attend regularly (30 percent compared to 50 percent).” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 7)

“We know that four in 10 parents (41 percent) are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school a term. This really matters for attendance. Parents who are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school per term are more than twice as likely to have a child who doesn't regularly attend school (61 percent), compared to those parents who are not comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school (27 percent).” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 4)

“Parent attitudes are really important for learner attendance. Parents who are comfortable with their child missing a week or more of school were more than twice as likely to have a child who doesn't regularly attend school.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 8)

“School and institutional factors can cause anxiety and emotional distress for students. One such example of school and institutional factors is bullying at school, which makes students feel unsafe and results in reduced attendance (Baiden et al., 2020; Malika et al., 2021). Smyth's (2007) studies of school dropouts found that students often had good reasons for not wanting to attend school, including wanting to protect their sense of self and personal well-being.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

“Peer relationships also significantly influence school absenteeism. Students who said that they did not have any friends in their class, experienced a sense of alienation and rejection (Nairn & Higgins, 2011). Hamm and Faircloth (2005) found that friendships provide students with social support that helps them feel safe, creates a buffer that helps them cope with psychological distress and generates a feeling of belonging at school, which is essential for academic success.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 85)

“Home and social background factors that contribute to student absenteeism include living in violent neighbourhoods, living with family members with substance misuse issues, and exposure to multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Stempel et al., 2017). However, a key criticism of blaming social backgrounds for absenteeism is that it promotes deficit thinking and ignores the role of factors within the school system that deter students from attending (Valencia, 2012).” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

“Students' home lives affect their level of attendance... Family problems also meant that some students were absent from school. Family dynamics can impact a student's well-being. Divorce, separation, illness, and death in the family can all affect students' attendance.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 85)

“Psychological concerns are another key factor that contributes to school absenteeism. A systematic review and meta-analysis of quantitative data strongly supports the association between depression and poor school attendance (Finning et al., 2019). Likewise, students who have anxiety often refuse to go to school to avoid emotional distress (Egger et al., 2003; Havik & Ingul, 2021).” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

“A substantial body of research has found that students who are frequently absent from school are more likely to drop out early and leave without any qualifications... and be involved in risky sexual behaviours and have unintended pregnancies... Further, students that frequently absent are more likely to have lower-paid employment (Hibbett et al., 1990), and to be involved in delinquent behaviours and crime (Rocque et al., 2017). Therefore, there are substantial personal and societal costs linked to absenteeism.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 73)

Teacher and Peer Relationships

Research indicates that relationships are central to student engagement and attendance, with teachers playing a particularly important role. Supportive teacher-student relationships provide not only academic help but also foster a sense of belonging and emotional connection, which are critical for student motivation and engagement (Bruce, 2018; Christenson et al., 2012; Education Review Office, 2023; Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023). Positive relationships with peers also enhance students’ sense of belonging, creating a supportive social environment where they feel valued, included, and safe (Bruce, 2018; Christenson et al., 2012; Education Review Office, 2023).

“...to flourish, student motivation and student engagement need supportive conditions, especially supportive student-teacher relationships” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 152)

- “...the teacher’s role is to support the student motivation and engagement that is already there and to do so in a way that allows for high- (rather than low-) quality motivation and engagement” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 152).
- “A positive relationship with both friends and teachers was a significant reason for disengagement and reengagement in education for all young people interviewed as part of this study” (Bruce, 2018, p. 28).
- “Social-relatedness factors can also affect student engagement. Children who report a higher sense of relatedness with teachers and peers show greater affective and behavioral engagement” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 406).
- “Students’ enthusiasm, interest, happiness, and comfort in school, then, seem to be shaped by their sense of relatedness to others” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 406).
- “Where young people had good friendships and felt they belonged within the school, they were more likely to engage. Destructive peer relationships (e.g. through being bullied), or negative teacher relationships (e.g. through not feeling cared for or understood by the teachers) seemed to be the most prevalent factor leading to truancy” (Bruce, 2018, p. 28).

- “Research on school bullying and victimization has also revealed that children with larger circles of friends, higher levels of peer acceptance, and lower levels of peer victimization tend to like school more” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 406).
- “...teacher support was significantly correlated with student belonging. This implies supportive relationships and a student’s sense of belonging are interconnected. Consequently, students who do not feel supported in their classes and experience a sense of belonging at school are significantly more likely to be absent” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 84)
- “Positive relationships with teachers and peers are necessary to create a positive environment, but teachers are primary in establishing relationships with students, setting the tone in the classroom, providing personal and academic support, and encouraging positive student-student relationships” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 9).
- “Evidence suggests promoting positive relationships between teachers and learners and promoting connectedness and belonging are two key ways to improve attendance. This can go alongside implementing an anti-bullying plan and ensuring cultural safety.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 9)
- “...schools need to examine their processes for keeping students safe and dealing with issues such as bullying effectively to address the level of absenteeism.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

Bullying in Schools

Research states that bullying is a widespread and serious issue in Aotearoa New Zealand, with nearly half of students reporting that they experience bullying ‘sometimes or often.’ Bullying can take many forms—physical, verbal, indirect, and online/text—and affects students from all backgrounds, regardless of their capability, popularity, or level of adjustment (Adams et al., 2012; Denny et al., 2014; Marsh et al., 2010; Green et al., 2013). Bullying behaviours often begin at a young age and are especially common in boys-only schools (Green et al., 2013). Research suggests that boys are more likely than girls to both experience and perpetrate bullying, and students in rural and low socioeconomic areas face higher risks (Denny et al., 2014; Marsh et al., 2010).

The impact of bullying is profound, affecting students’ sense of safety, school attendance, and mental health. While teachers and school staff play an essential role, evidence suggests that teacher intervention alone is insufficient to prevent bullying. Many students choose not to report bullying to teachers, believing that doing so may not stop the behaviour or could even make it worse. Conversely, student-led interventions, where students take action to stop bullying, are associated with lower reports of bullying (Denny et al., 2014; Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023).

“Findings indicate that all of the participating schools experienced some degree of bullying and supports previous research that few schools are immune to bullying... No matter how capable, popular and well-adjusted students are, many of them experience bullying in one form or another” (Adams et al., 2012, p. 22).

- “...bullying behaviors are common in New Zealand high schools, with 6% of students reporting being bullied weekly or more often and almost 5% of students report bullying other students weekly or more often as well” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 17).

- “Overall 47% of the sample, 45% of the girls and 50% of the boys, had been bullied “sometimes or often” during the current school year... The most common forms were teasing/name calling (29%), having rumours passed around (22%), being excluded (19%), being physically hurt (15%) and having unwanted text messages sent to them (11%)” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 238).
- “Nearly half of participants had been bullied in the current school year, and one in three reported bullying others” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 239).
- “Recent literature indicates that bullying remains a major issue facing schools today... A large New Zealand study by Adair, Dixon, Moore and Sutherland (2000) revealed that 75% of the 2066 secondary students surveyed stated they had been bullied during that year and 44% had bullied others” (Adams et al., 2012, p. 19).
- “Bullying is deliberately harmful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, by a person or group, who target a less powerful person as the victim. The hurtful actions can be (1) physical, such as hitting and punching; (2) verbal assaults, such as teasing and name calling; or (3) indirect, such as psychological exclusion from friendship groups or spreading rumours” (Adams et al., 2012, p. 19).
- “A significant number of NZ students are bullied through text messages, and the possibility of this type of bullying increasing rapidly in the future is likely as more students gain access to the internet, mobile phone ownership increases, and sophisticated mobile phones become more affordable. Text bullying is not going to replace traditional forms of bullying, but rather act as an additional way of bullying one’s fellow students” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 239)
- “...students who both received and sent unwanted texts felt less safe at school (especially boys) or missed school (especially girls). This finding is consistent with the reported relationship between traditional forms of bullying and feeling unsafe” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 239).
- “Similar to previous studies, we found that boys, younger students (Nansel et al., 2001), students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Kumpulainen, Räsänen, & Henttonen, 1999) and students from smaller towns (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992) and rural areas (Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, & Blackburn, 2004) were more likely to experience being bullied” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 17, 18).

“...girls-only schools were associated with fewer reports of bullying behaviors and boys-only schools were associated with more reports of bullying behaviors compared to coeducational schools” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 18).

“There are also suggestions that single-sex schooling can increase gender stereotypes, which for boys in boys-only schools may exacerbate aggressive behaviors” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 6).

“Boys were significantly more likely than girls to experience physical bullying, and teasing/name calling ($p < 0.001$). Girls were more likely to experience unwanted text messages ($p = 0.002$)” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 238).

“While most students reported that they had rarely or never bullied other students, 37% did report having bullied others ‘sometimes or often’. Such bullying was carried out significantly more by boys than girls (45% versus 28% respectively, $p < 0.001$)” (Marsh et al., 2010, p. 238).

“The majority of teachers and school staff believed that bullying begins early (i.e., 68% indicated they believed it began before Year 4). This finding aligns with the TIMSS study, which found that in New Zealand, Year 5 students reported higher levels of bullying than Year 9 students (Mullis et al., 2012). As such, the development of bullying prevention and intervention programmes which target young children should be considered” (Green et al., 2013, p. 11).

“Results of multilevel analysis suggested that schools characterized by students taking action to stop bullying were associated with less victimization and less reported bullying among students. In contrast, in schools where students reported teachers take action to stop bullying, there was no decline in victimization or bullying. Overall, these findings support whole-school approaches that aid students to take action to stop bullying” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 4).

“Teachers and adult staff at school also play an important role in the school culture of bullying. However, students’ perceptions of the ability of teachers to prevent school bullying are poor” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 7).

“It is well recognized that as students progress through school they become less inclined to tell teachers about bullying; this may reflect the inability of teachers to prevent further bullying or that by informing a teacher could make things even worse” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 19).

“We know that both the victims and witnesses of bullying are choosing not to tell their teachers, for whatever reason. Perhaps friends and peers hold the key to turning around the culture of bullying” (Adams et al., 2012, p. 22).

“The New Zealand study by Adair, Dixon, Moore and Sutherland (2000) found that when bullying was observed by other students, they were just as likely to ignore it as to take action. With bullying, there are no neutral observers” (Adams et al., 2012, p. 22).

“Students recurrently expressed that they were absent from school to avoid being bullied... Students stated that when teachers were aware of bullying but failed to intervene, this made them feel unsafe. Teachers must intervene when they witness bullying at school to reduce absenteeism” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 85).

“Results of multilevel analysis suggested that schools characterized by students taking action to stop bullying were associated with less victimization and less reported bullying among students. In contrast, in schools where students reported teachers take action to stop bullying, there was no decline in victimization or bullying (Denny et al., 2014, p. 4).

Student Mental Health

Research demonstrates a strong link between mental health and academic outcomes, with poor mental health often leading to a range of negative consequences, including educational underachievement (Johns, 2017). While most students, approximately three-quarters, according to Fleming et al. (2014), report good overall wellbeing, a substantial proportion continue to experience serious mental health issues. Certain groups, such as Māori youth, girls, and students from low-income backgrounds, are disproportionately affected and experience higher levels of emotional distress (Fleming et al., 2014; Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Johns (2017) highlights this disparity, noting that students living in poverty are 2–3 times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared to their peers.

“The findings supported research that has found there is a definite relationship between academic achievement and mental health” (Johns, 2017, p. 62).

“The mental health of students is a major factor affecting their ability to learn and their resulting academic outcomes” (Johns, 2017, p. 63).

“In 2012, approximately three-quarters (76.2%, 95% CI 74.8–77.5) of students reported good overall wellbeing. By contrast (also in 2012), some students reported self-harming (24.0%, 95% CI 22.7–25.4), depressive symptoms (12.8%, 95% CI 11.6–13.9), 2 weeks of low mood (31%, 95% CI 29.7–32.5), suicidal ideation (15.7%, 95% CI 14.5–17.0), and suicide attempts (4.5%, 95% CI 3.8–5.2)” (Fleming et al., 2014, p. 472).

“Consistent with previous research, we report higher rates of emotional symptoms among females and older students” (Fleming et al., 2014, p. 475).

“The prevalence of emotional health problems, including depression, eating issues and suicidal behaviours, are alarmingly high amongst students, particularly female students. The rates of these problems in New Zealand youth are up to twice those found in the recent national mental health survey of young people in Australia” (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003, p. 7).

“Denny, Lewycka, et al. (2016) examined indicators of socioeconomic deprivation among New Zealand secondary school students, using a national adolescent health survey and found that depressive symptoms were 2–3 times higher in the poverty groups compared to students not experiencing poverty” (Johns, 2017, p. 62).

“Research has shown that mental health disorders during adolescence are often associated with a range of negative outcomes. These can include: increased anxiety, anger, bullying, unhappiness, depression, educational underachievement, and suicide” (Johns, 2017, p. 61).

“Based on the results from Youth’07 and Youth’12, there has been no substantial improvement with respect to suicidality among secondary school students in New Zealand.” (Fleming et al., 2014, p. 475).

“Secondary school based counsellors are used as early intervention in childhood mental health issues in New Zealand. However, the current ratio of counsellors to students in secondary schools is often 1:1,000, when the ratio should be 1:400 to work with secondary students in an effective manner” (Johns, 2017, p. 62).

LGBTQ+ Student Challenges

Research states transgender and same/both-sex attracted students in Aotearoa New Zealand face significant challenges. These students are more likely to experience bullying, discrimination, and concerns about personal safety at school compared to heterosexual, cisgender students (Clark et al., 2014; Lucassen et al., 2011). Transgender students, in particular, are at an increased risk of mistreatment, with over half reporting fear of harm at school and one in five experiencing frequent bullying (Clark et al., 2014). These hostile and stressful environments contribute significantly to the issues faced by these students, including higher risks of depressive symptoms, self-harm, and suicide attempts. Despite these elevated risks, same/both-sex attracted and transgender students face barriers to accessing health care for emotional support (Clark et al., 2014; Lucassen et al., 2014).

“Students who were not exclusively opposite-sex attracted were also more likely to have seen a health professional for emotional worries and to have more difficulty getting this help” (Lucassen et al., 2011, p. 14).

“We found that transgender students and those reporting not being sure are a numerically small but important group. Transgender students are diverse and are represented across demographic variables, including their sexual attractions. Transgender youth face considerable health and well-being disparities” (Clark et al., 2014, p. 93).

“Relative to their non-transgender peers, students in the other gender groups had increased health and wellbeing needs. Transgender students appeared to have the greatest needs. In particular, approximately 40% of these students had significant depressive symptoms, had harmed themselves, and had been unable to access health care when they needed it. One in five transgender students had attempted suicide in the previous 12 months” (Clark et al., 2014, p. 96).

“There were significant associations between sexual attraction and the risk of self-harm, suicidality and significant depressive symptoms with students attracted to both sexes at greatest risk and those attracted to the opposite sex or to neither sex at the least risk” (Lucassen et al., 2011, p. 13).

“...mental health issues have not improved since 2001, and worryingly the proportion of same/both-sex attracted students experiencing significant depressive symptoms has increased from 27.0% in 2001 to 41.3% in 2012, while the proportion of opposite-sex attracted students with these symptoms has remained fairly constant” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 5).

“Approximately one in ten (10.6%) same/both-sex attracted students reported having severe difficulties with their emotions, concentration, behaviour, or getting along with others” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 20).

“...transgender students and those who were not sure or did not understand the question were at increased risk of being bullied, having physical fights, depressive symptoms, and suicide attempts, and being unable to access health care compared with their non-transgender peers” (Clark et al., 2014, p. 96).

“Students who were transgender, not sure, or did not understand the question were at increased risk of violence and had compromised personal safety. In particular, transgender students appeared especially vulnerable to mistreatment. For example, more than half were afraid someone at school would hurt or bother them, and nearly one in five transgender students reported experiencing bullying at school on a weekly (or more frequent) basis (Table 3)” (Clark et al., 2014, p. 95, 96).

“...the 134 students who were out, are potentially at risk of chronic stress, including verbal and physical abuse from both peers and adults [10] as gay and lesbian students tend to report elevated rates of victimization and homophobic bullying from their peers at school” (Lucassen et al., 2011, p. 15)

“...same/both-sex attracted youth are more likely to be bullied, be physically harmed, and to be afraid that someone would hurt or bother them at school” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 5).

“Almost one-in-five same/both-sex attracted students reported being bullied at school on a weekly or more frequent basis (16.5%).

“...it is hostile and stressful surroundings that lead to the problems experienced by many same/both-sex attracted individuals (Adams, Dickinson, & Asiasiga, 2013; Stevens, 2013). This relationship has been demonstrated in recent studies where abuse on the basis of sexuality (and/or gender identity) has been directly linked to suicidality and depression for same/both-sex attracted adolescents” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 7).

Parental Involvement

Research shows that parental involvement (PI) is essential for helping children succeed in school and for fostering positive school communities across Aotearoa New Zealand. However, strong relationships between schools and parents, whānau, and communities are not consistent everywhere. Parental engagement often decreases as children grow older, and various barriers make it harder for parents to stay involved. These barriers include family circumstances (e.g., being a solo parent or working full-time), financial challenges, concerns from parents about children’s behaviour, unwelcoming school environments, parents lacking confidence in supporting their child’s learning, negative attitudes from some teachers, and rigid school structures that discourage parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Mutch & Collins, 2012; Robinson et al., 2009).

“ERO [Education Review Office’s] evaluations have shown that not all schools have positive relationships with all their parents, whānau, or communities. Some parents do not feel well informed about their child’s learning or about how they could work more closely with the school to benefit their child. Some schools, especially secondary schools, report that low levels of parental response hamper their efforts to consult with parents, whānau, and communities or involve them more in school life” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 168).

“Teachers with positive, facilitating attitudes toward involving parents encourage more parents to become involved and increase the effectiveness of PI (Eccles and Harold 1993). When parents perceive that teachers are not open to involving parents this acts as a major barrier to PI” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 40).

“Parent support is expected to play an important role in student engagement in school. It is well documented that parenting styles... and parental involvement... contribute to children’s academic performance in school. Students will be engaged in school when they perceive that their parents have high expectations of them and provide them with encouragement and assistance” (Christenson et al., 2012, p. 407).

“Parental involvement (PI) in the education of their children has been regarded as an important element of effective education for at least 40 years (see DES 1967). There is now an extensive research literature indicating that PI is advantageous for children of all ages” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 37).

“Research evidence from a wide range of studies and syntheses... shows that effective partnerships between parents, families, and schools can result in better outcomes for students. The better the engagement between parents, families, and schools, the greater the positive impact on student learning” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 168).

“Effective partnerships between parents, whānau, communities, and schools lead to improved educational, social, and behavioral outcomes” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 174).

“Teachers and parents who set high but attainable expectations in a supportive, reflective learning environment increase student success, regardless of students’ socioeconomic status or ethnicity” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 175).

“Whānau and communities that engage in and support children’s learning profoundly shape children’s aspirations and expectations” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 175).

“Learning partnerships strengthen parents’ understanding and involvement in their child’s education. Parents feel that their contributions are valued. Effective learning partnerships have positive impacts on student outcomes” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 183).

“Particular kinds of school–family connections can have large positive effects on the academic and social outcomes of students, especially those who have been under-served or who are at risk... Certain kinds of school–home partnerships can help to effectively address antisocial behaviour” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 45).

“Parental involvement in school activities lessens as students progress through the system with formal parent–teacher interviews/conferences still the main form of contact between parents and secondary schools” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 174).

“The age of children can be a barrier to the involvement of parents since it is widely acknowledged that PI decreases as children grow older and is at its lowest level for children of secondary school age” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 42).

“There persists amongst many teachers a deficit model of parents which is manifested through attitudes whereby parents are viewed as “problems”, “vulnerable”, or “less able” and are therefore best kept out of schools” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 45).

“Henderson and Berla (1994) point out that school organisation, historically structured along factory production lines, continues today... Many schools still bear the hallmarks of the formality, inflexibility and timetabling that characterised schooling historically, and which are counterproductive to forming parent-school relationships that require flexibility” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 48).

“...the way that parents view their role in their children’s education is crucial. Parents who believe that their role is only to get children to school, which then takes over responsibility for their education, will not be willing to be actively involved in either school-based or home-based PI” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 39)

“The belief that parents have in their own ability to help their children succeed at school is the second belief which is crucial to PI. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) point out that parents with a low level of belief in their ability to help their children are likely to avoid contact with schools because of their view that such involvement will not bring about positive outcomes for their children” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 39, 40).

“Family circumstances can be major barriers to PI. For example, solo parents and those with young families or large families may find it more difficult to get involved in PI because of their caretaking responsibilities” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 41).

“Parents’ work situations can also be a factor. When parents are unemployed money could be an issue as they may not be able to afford a car or to pay babysitters in order to get to school meetings” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 41).

“...there is usually a negative correlation between PI and children’s behaviour problems, such that the more disruptive the behaviour the less parents are inclined to be involved with the school.” (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 44).

“Research shows that the majority of parents care about their children’s education and, with encouragement, will enter into productive partnerships with schools to lift achievement levels” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 173).

Education to Employment Transition

While many young people in Aotearoa New Zealand are able to transition smoothly from school to work, significant challenges remain as these pathways have become more complex and less linear. Research shows that poor educational outcomes, such as underachievement or leaving school without qualifications, severely limit students’ future opportunities and can contribute to low skill levels, unemployment, and cycles of poverty. Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds face even greater risks, often having fewer connections and less family guidance to support their educational and career decisions (Bibbee, 2013).

Adding to these challenges is a mismatch between the skills taught in schools and those required by employers, as well as a lack of soft skills among youth, such as discipline and courteousness. Although vocational education and training (VET) programmes have been introduced to address these gaps, they often face challenges such as low prestige and limited opportunities for structured work placements, resulting in mixed success (Bibbee, 2013).

“Employers also complain of deficient “soft” skills (discipline, courteousness, interaction, etc.) afflicting all worker segments. Such non-cognitive skills now play as important a role in school and work success as their more easily measurable counterparts (Heckman and Krueger, 2004)” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 36).

“An important feature of youth transition is the dynamics of initial job search. The NZ transition process is relatively smooth because of the traditionally low likelihood and short duration of unemployment spells. The OECD’s 2008 Jobs for Youth study (OECD, 2008) estimated the average time lag between the end of schooling and the start of an initial job for NZ youth at around five months, compared with 11/2 to 2 years in the other OECD countries examined” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 8).

“...youth transitions (as elsewhere) are more complex and less linear than they once were (Rea and Callister, 2009). Early job experience involves high turnover, uncertainty and little on-the-job skills development” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 5).

“One-third of 20 to 24 year olds have left education without completing a school-level qualification, which seems far too high for the needs of a productive economy with a high level of social capital. Many of them will get trapped in chronic joblessness and a cycle of poverty that risks becoming multi-generational” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 5, 6).

“Those in disadvantaged groups tend to have poor scholastic outcomes. These initial educational handicaps show up in higher drop-out rates and youth joblessness, greatly limiting these youths’ future life chances” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 2).

“Youth from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds enjoy fewer contacts and less family guidance about educational and career choices” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 11).

“As elsewhere, education appears to be the best protection against unemployment for youth and adults alike” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 6).

“...the real concern is with the group of young people who do not gain any secure attachment to the workforce and have no useful educational qualifications. They require more focused career advice and clearer vocational pathways while still at school in order to be able to access on-the-job skills development immediately upon transitioning to work” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 8, 9).

“A related problem is the apparently large divergence between the nature of skills supplied by the education sector and the skills demanded by employers” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 2)

“Successive governments and individual secondary schools have tried to address the needs of at-risk students through the introduction of vocational education and training (VET), notably Gateway, which enables upper-secondary students to undertake structured workplace learning while still in school. Apart from a few successes, such courses have suffered from low prestige” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 32).

“There are some risks associated with an expansion of VET. In market-based VET systems like New Zealand’s where there are few institutional mechanisms for transition (e.g. work placements), students may flounder about in several low-skill jobs before they find one consistent with their VET experience” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 43)

“VET and workplace learning, by their applied nature, have a central role to play in strengthening linkages between education and work. They could also help to motivate disengaged secondary students, preventing high drop-out rates” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 42).

Snapshot of National Media

This analysis provides an in-depth review of media coverage relating to secondary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The goal of this review is to highlight the public discourse surrounding secondary education and provide a current snapshot of how issues within secondary education are portrayed in the media. This ensures our understanding of the secondary education landscape stays informed by the latest discussions and developments.

Overview of Media Coverage

Our examination includes 400+ articles published in the last 12 months, dating back to November 2023, contributed by prominent New Zealand media sources. Below (see figure 10), we indicate the frequency of media reports by month, highlighting increases and decreases in discussions during specific periods.

In addition to visualising the frequency of media coverage, we identified the common themes across all articles. These key themes are:

- 1 Declining Achievement Rates
- 2 Co-requisite Test Challenges
- 3 NCEA Standards Scrutiny
- 4 NCEA Exam Challenges
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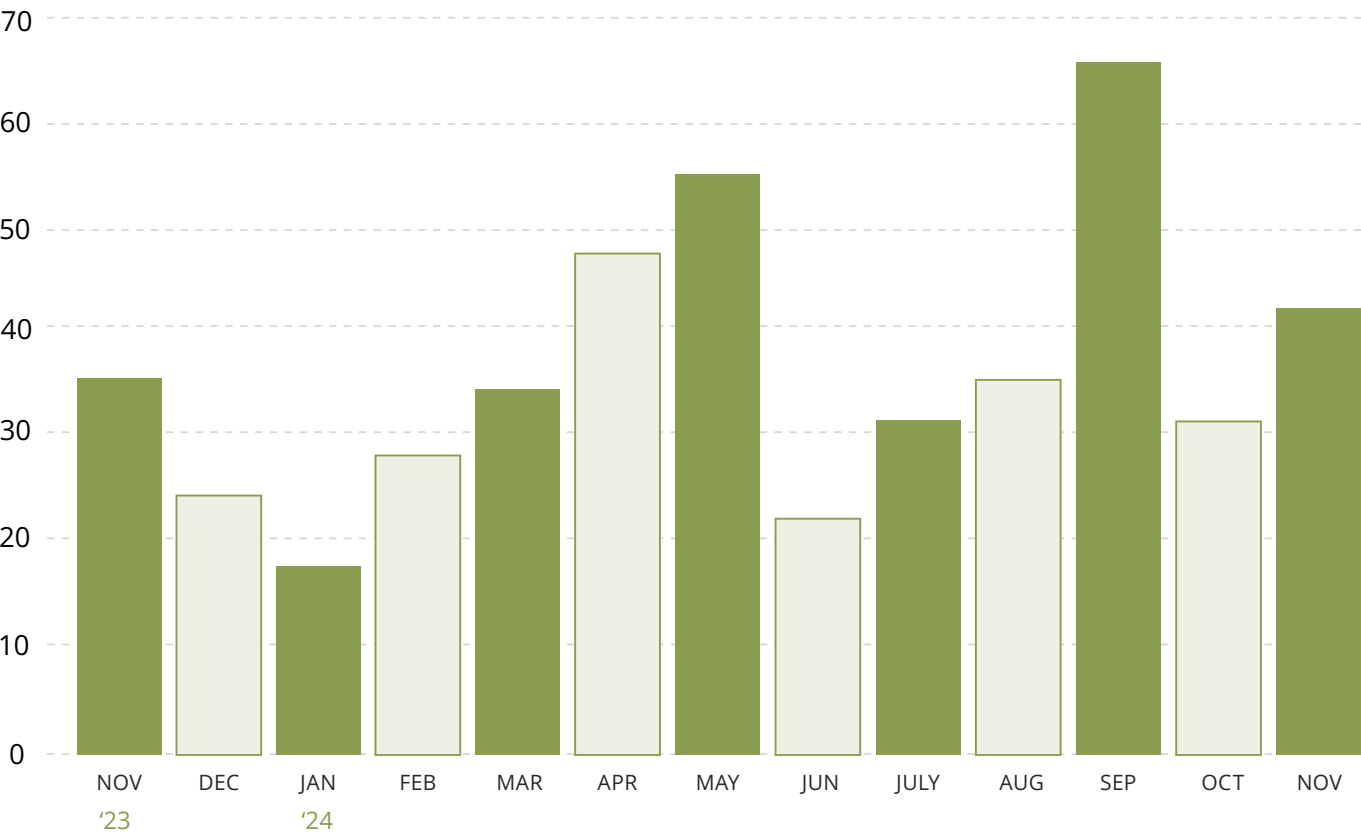


Figure 10 - Monthly Frequency of Media Publications on Secondary Education.

Declining Achievement Rates

Media captures the decline in New Zealand’s educational performance, reflected in falling NCEA achievement rates and international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). NCEA pass rates for Levels 1, 2, and 3, as well as university entrance, have declined for a third consecutive year, raising concerns across the education sector. These outcomes highlight a range of challenges affecting student achievement according to the media, including teacher shortages, absenteeism, socioeconomic pressures such as financial hardship, and lingering disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“When NCEA results were released last month, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority indicated achievement of Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and University Entrance had dropped for a third straight year” (1News, 2024).

“A continuous decline in NCEA and university entrance attainment results has been labelled as “disappointing” and symbolic of the Covid-19 pandemic” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

“Teenagers in New Zealand are being faced with a tough choice: a quality education or putting food on the table for their family” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).



26 FEB 2024

NCEA provisional data: Achievement drops as much as 8%

Provisional results for high school qualification NCEA shows some regions experienced significant drops in achievement last year.

(1News, 2024).

Co-requisite Test Challenges

Media highlights the introduction of the new NCEA literacy and numeracy co-requisite tests, which have brought significant challenges to secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. These high-stakes tests, now a requirement for achieving any NCEA qualification, have placed mounting pressure on schools to prepare students, many of whom enter secondary education lacking foundational skills in reading, writing, and maths. Reports point to low pass rates, particularly among Māori and Pasifika students, highlighting concerns about equity and accessibility. In response, the government has extended alternative education pathways and announced targeted funding to support struggling students through small-group interventions and teacher training.

“The Education Minister Erica Stanford says help is on the way for teenagers struggling to pass new NCEA maths, reading and writing tests” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“Secondary school principals are calling for a rethink after thousands of teenagers failed new NCEA literacy and numeracy tests with Māori and Pacific students hardest hit” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



28 AUG 2024

Low pass rates in new online NCEA literacy, numeracy tests worry secondary teachers

Secondary school principals are calling for a rethink after thousands of teenagers failed new NCEA literacy and numeracy tests with Māori and Pacific students hardest hit.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

NCEA Standards Scrutiny

Media coverage highlights widespread debate over education reforms in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly the rollout of new NCEA Level 1 standards. While the reforms aim to streamline assessments and improve educational outcomes, they have faced significant scrutiny. Critics question whether the qualification adequately prepares students for higher levels of NCEA or whether it should continue. Although the changes aim to improve educational outcomes, their execution has placed further strain on an already overburdened sector which has undermined trust in NCEA as a fair and reliable qualification.

“The Education Review Office has called for the reform of NCEA Level 1, saying it is “not a fair or reliable” measure of knowledge and skills and while it is manageable for students, it does not always motivate them to achieve or continue studying” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
“...what we’re finding is those significant pieces of work are intimidating for many students. They’ve actually become higher stakes because there’s far more credits and far more investment involved in them” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).



16 SEPT 2024

New NCEA Level 1 standards adding to workload for teachers and students

Some schools are finding changes to the first level of the national school qualification harder to work with than the old version.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

NCEA Exam Challenges

Media coverage of NCEA exams in Aotearoa New Zealand reflects the mixed experiences of students and teachers during the exam period. While some articles share useful tips for student success, many highlight widespread frustrations with the assessment process. Key concerns include confusing or poorly written questions, a mismatch between what was taught in class and what appeared in exams, and questions that were unusually difficult. There were also technical problems with online exams, such as website crashes and log-in errors. These challenges have added stress for both students and teachers, with many criticisms directed at NZQA for not being better prepared.

“The maths teacher 1News spoke to reported issues accessing the online test on Monday, Thursday and this morning, while on Tuesday the numeracy and Pāngarau tests were not available. On one occasion, students were kicked off the online system halfway through the exam” (1News, 2023).
“Some attempted to answer the question, others left it blank. It caused anxiety amongst the students and frustration for the teachers” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



7 NOV 2024

Tears after NCEA students report confusing exam questions on topics not taught in class

There were tears and frustration on the first day of NCEA exams this week with some students saying questions were poorly written, confusing and not connected to the curriculum.

(New Zealand Herald, 2024).

Teacher Shortages

Media reports extensively cover the worsening teacher shortage crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand, highlighting challenges such as an ageing workforce, low recruitment rates, and many teachers leaving the profession. The crisis is further exacerbated by rising student numbers, staff absences due to illness, and a shortage of relief teachers, forcing some schools to roster students for home learning or close classrooms.

Articles also capture the additional pressures teachers face, including rapid changes in education policies and insufficient pay, which contribute to the growing issue. While government efforts, such as fast-tracking residency for international teachers, increasing funding for training, and offering scholarships for Māori teacher trainees, are noted by the media, criticism persists, with many arguing these measures lack the robustness and sustainability needed for long-term solutions.

“Secondary school principals warn they are struggling to find enough good teachers to staff their classrooms next year” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



27 NOV 2023

Teacher shortages set to worsen as few students sign up to teach secondary school

Secondary school principals warn they are struggling to find enough good teachers to staff their classrooms next year.

(New Zealand Herald, 2024).

Snapshot of National Media

Bullying in Schools

Media coverage sheds light on the concerning landscape of violence, bullying, and disruptive behaviour in and outside schools across Aotearoa New Zealand. With stand-down rates now at their highest levels in decades, reports link these behavioural challenges to factors such as the lingering effects of COVID-19, the influence of social media, and a rise in online bullying. Educators are concerned about the strain on school environments, with some schools even refusing to enrol expelled students.

While stricter stand-down policies and disciplinary measures have been introduced to address some of these issues, media reports highlight ongoing criticism from educators and experts who argue these approaches alone are insufficient to tackle the root causes of disruptive behaviour.

“Stand-downs, suspensions and exclusions for assaults on other students rose nationally in 2023, and doubled in some regions” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
“More school students are being stood down and suspended from New Zealand schools, as educators raise concerns about behaviour” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



5 MAR 2024

NZ school stand-down rates highest in 20 years

Schools stood down pupils 25,167 times in 2022 - the highest number in more than 20 years of records, Education Ministry figures show.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

Truancy and Attendance

Media reports highlight a growing issue in school attendance across Aotearoa New Zealand, with truancy reaching a ‘crisis point’. According to the media, less than half of students are attending school regularly, and absenteeism rates have doubled over the past seven years. Reports cite various reasons for truancy, including mental health challenges, illness, the lingering impacts of COVID-19, disengagement from school, dissatisfaction with the education system, discrimination, and family-related factors.

The media has also captured responses to this crisis, including government-led initiatives such as stricter truancy crackdowns, new education priorities, and improved attendance tracking mechanisms. However, these measures have faced criticism, with some arguing that punitive approaches fail to address the systemic issues underpinning absenteeism.

“Kearney said school attendance is “highly complex” and there could be any number of reasons why a student is not attending school” (1News, 2024).



20 DEC 2023

Less than half of students went to class regularly in term three: Ministry figures

Only 46 percent of school pupils attended classes regularly in term three, one of the worst figures on record, with Māori and Pacific students worst affected, Education Ministry figures show.

(Radio New Zealand, 2023).

Mobile Phone Bans

Media reports highlight the nationwide school mobile phone ban in Aotearoa New Zealand, capturing a mix of support and concerns. Many articles reflect optimism, particularly from educators and students, who see the ban as a way to reduce distractions and improve focus and engagement in schools. However, concerns have also been raised about its implementation and fairness, particularly for neurodiverse students, as well as reports of students finding creative ways to bypass the restrictions.

“There are some doubts about the government-enforced cellphone ban in schools - with one student questioning how it will be implemented when teachers cannot even stop students vaping” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“Ditching cellphones at school has led to new real-world connections, according to one of the country’s largest secondary schools” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“It said evidence supported the view that the “hauora/wellbeing of students” improved without phones because they could build social interactions with those “immediately around them” (New Zealand Herald, 2023).



16 FEB 2024

'It feels like a blanket thing for all children', neurodiverse kids struggle with phone ban

Some neurodiverse children are struggling with the government's 'away for the day' ban on phones in schools.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

Charter Schools

Media coverage highlights the reintroduction and expansion of charter schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, with advocates, such as David Seymour, championing the model as a pathway to educational innovation. The government has committed substantial funding to support the initiative, raising optimism for an improved educational ecosystem.

However, articles also highlight significant criticism and apprehension among educators and unions, with concerns about the potential impact on public education. Issues such as financial oversight, educational equity, and the effectiveness of the charter school system are central to the debate, with some critics describing the initiative as misaligned with broader educational priorities.

“The president of the country’s largest teaching union says David Seymour’s lofty ambitions for charter schools in New Zealand would be an expensive “experiment”, saying there is no evidence to suggest the alternative schooling model can deliver on promised outcomes” (1News, 2024).



30 SEPT 2024

Charter schools \$153m 'experiment' won't deliver, union says

The president of the country's largest teaching union says David Seymour's lofty ambitions for charter schools in New Zealand would be an expensive "experiment"...

(1News, 2024).

School Infrastructure

Media coverage highlights growing concerns about the safety of school buildings in Aotearoa New Zealand, with reports revealing that some schools have had to close facilities due to earthquake risks, including newly constructed buildings. While the government has pledged additional funding to upgrade and build new schools, delays and cancellations of building projects by the Ministry of Education have sparked criticism and frustration among schools and parents.

“More than a third of the country’s 27 quake-prone school buildings were built in the past 20 years and include almost an entire Auckland secondary school” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“One of the country’s largest schools, Burnside High School in Christchurch, has closed its administration block because it was found to be an earthquake risk” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“Principals are frustrated and worried by a decision to halt 100 school building projects... The Education Ministry has put the projects on hold as part of a move it says will save \$2 billion” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).



4 JUN 2024

Quake-prone schools include those built in past 20 years: Education Ministry

More than a third of the country's 27 quake-prone school buildings were built in the past 20 years and include almost an entire Auckland secondary school.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

School Lunch Programme

Media reports highlight changes and challenges in New Zealand’s free school lunch programme. While the programme is praised for its positive impact on student wellbeing and engagement, recent funding cuts and a revamped model have caused concern. Principals and educators express disappointment over smaller budgets, less healthy menu options, and the potential exclusion of kaupapa Māori suppliers, raising questions about the food’s quality.

The new programme aims to feed more students for less, with more affordable recipes. However, critics worry about its effectiveness, sustainability, and the loss of manaakitanga (hospitality) in the process. The debate highlights the tension between saving money and staying true to the programme’s original goal of supporting student health and wellbeing.

“Principals, teachers and parents have all seen the benefits of kids getting a free and healthy school lunch. Kids learn better when their tummies are full” (1News, 2024).

“Reports like this, [are] not surprising, the findings that overwhelmingly [say] food in schools supports wellbeing, because it’s a no-brainer, and doesn’t take rocket science to know that it does.” -Karl Vasau (Radio New Zealand, 2024).



25 NOV 2024

Principals' anger over cutbacks to 'jolly good' school lunch scheme

At least two schools have opted out of the revised free lunch scheme, Ka Ora Ka Ako, for next year.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

Māori Initiatives and Achievements

Media reports highlight cultural achievements and initiatives supporting Māori students, showcasing the growing prominence of Māori-medium education, Te Reo Māori immersion workshops, kapa haka competitions, and Māori student leadership across Aotearoa New Zealand. These articles celebrate Māori cultural identity and acknowledge the significant contributions of rangatahi (youth) in advancing Māori success.

“The two Inspiring the Future workshops were delivered in full te reo Māori. They were aimed to broaden the career horizons of about 50 kura kaupapa students from Kaikohe and Hokianga” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

“Seeing the pride and passion these tamariki bring to the stage is exactly why Tararua Reap gets behind this festival. As an educational facilitator, we celebrate the importance of kapa haka and how it teaches our tamariki and community to appreciate, value and understand Māori culture performing arts” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

“The establishment of kura kaupapa Māori, the higher number of tamariki in Māori medium education, and Iwi reo revitalisation have been a large driver of this development” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



2 NOV 2023

Kura from Tāmaki Makaurau scoops top kapa haka prize

Te Kura o Kaupapa Māori o Hoani Waititi Marae has taken out the top prize at Te Mana Kuratahi primary school kapa haka competition.

(Radio New Zealand, 2023).

Pasifika Education

Media reports highlight various efforts to support Pasifika students, centred on educational equity and cultural preservation. Articles capture initiatives such as improving pathways to university, empowering families to actively champion their children’s education through programmes like Talanoa Ako, as well as the growing uptake of Pacific languages in schools. Collectively, these efforts reflect a strong commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable future for Pasifika students and their communities.

“The University of Auckland is partnering with 12 high schools to reverse declining entrance qualification rates for Pacific students” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“The University of Auckland has announced a new partnership with secondary schools to boost students’ academic success.... Associate director Liletina Vaka says the university is excited by the goal of achieving university entrance (UE) parity for... Pacific learners by 2030” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

“New data shows Pacific language uptake in New Zealand’s primary and secondary schools has grown 40 percent over the last five years” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).



16 APR 2024

New initiative to get more Pacific students uni-ready

The University of Auckland is partnering with 12 high schools to reverse declining entrance qualification rates for Pacific students.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

School Population

Media reports highlight growing pressure on schools across Aotearoa New Zealand due to rising enrolments, driven by population growth and increased migration. Schools in high-demand areas are struggling to accommodate students, with some introducing enrolment zones to manage capacity and others facing issues like fraudulent enrolments and families attempting to bypass zoning rules. Articles also discuss the urgent need for new schools and classrooms in rapidly growing regions.

“A secondary school principal says some Auckland schools are experiencing a “massive spike” in the number of students being fraudulently enrolled — with some parents going to great lengths to attempt to cheat the system” (1News, 2024).

“The Education Ministry has warned the government that new schools and classrooms are urgently needed in high-growth areas” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“Four new classrooms have been shipped into Levin’s Horowhenua College to help address the sharpest roll increase at the school in more than 70 years” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



4 JUL 2024

New schools and classrooms urgently needed in high-growth areas, ministry warns

The Education Ministry has warned the government that new schools and classrooms are urgently needed in high-growth areas.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Some reports highlight growing concerns about the mental health and wellbeing of secondary school students, which is now recognised as the top issue facing schools. These articles show how school counsellors and principals are facing increasing pressure due to rising cases of anxiety, depression, and other challenges among students, compounded by stretched mental health services and inadequate resources. There are growing calls for change, including increased funding, equitable access to counselling services, and addressing the escalating workloads of educators and counsellors.

“A national survey shows support for students with mental health and wellbeing problems has become the number one issue for secondary schools” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).

“School counsellors were struggling to keep up with demand from students seeking help for problems, including anxiety and depression” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).

“Teachers have reported student health and wellbeing are an ongoing concern... But they also say they are under-resourced, under-trained and stretched by the wide array of demands on them” (New Zealand Herald, 2023).



3 NOV 2024

Mental health support top issue facing secondary schools: survey

A national survey shows support for students with mental health and wellbeing problems has become the number one issue for secondary schools.

(Radio New Zealand, 2023).

Changes to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Some reports highlight growing concerns among educators about the government’s plan to remove and replace Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) guidelines in schools, with this change facing significant pushback. Experts warn that this move could undermine efforts to teach consent, support the LGBTQ+ community, and prevent sexual violence, as schools are regarded as important spaces for open discussions and learning.

“Northland educators are concerned the Government’s plan to remove and replace Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) may have a negative impact on the rainbow community” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

“The new Government has taken a step backwards from ending sexual violence with its plan to remove and replacerelationship-basededucation,according to experts” (1News, 2023).

“We need to be having these conversations, and schools need to be a place where we can challenge and discuss and share different points of view” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).



19 DEC 2023

Northland educator hits out at Government ban on sex education

Northland educators are concerned the Government's plan to remove and replace Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) may have negative impact on the rainbow community.

(New Zealand Herald, 2023).

Technology and AI in Schools

Media reports highlight the growing influence of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in Aotearoa New Zealand’s education system, with both opportunities and challenges emerging. While AI is praised for its potential to enhance learning and support wellbeing, concerns about misuse have surfaced, with reports of students using AI to cheat on assignments leading some schools to abandon take-home assignments altogether.

“There’s the good side and then there’s the darker side where people might be using generative AI to makeplagiarismeasier...andthenthere’severything in between.” - Vaughan Couillault” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“Someschoolsareabandoningtake-homeessaysand assignments because students are using artificial intelligence to cheat” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).

“Some schools and universities have gone back to classic pen and paper exams and hand-written assignments, and have scrapped online tests after teachers noticed an increase in cheating using AI technology” (Radio New Zealand, 2024).



6 NOV 2024

Why AI won't ruin children's education

New versions of Artificial Intelligence are changing the education system and helping students get away with cheating.

(Radio New Zealand, 2024).

Summary of Community Insights

In this section, we delve into the lived experiences of the communities we engaged with, drawing on insights from our Equity and Wellbeing profiles and discussions with industry experts. Our focus is on identifying themes that reflect the main concerns from the community’s perspective within the secondary education landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Although we have aimed to capture the primary concerns, we acknowledge that we likely haven’t heard everything. What we share here aims to shine a light on what these communities deemed important, providing a foundation for understanding the secondary education landscape from the communities perspective.

The Academic-focused System isn’t for All

There is widespread concern by many that the current education system’s heavy academic focus fails to accommodate diverse learning styles and vocational interests. This leaves non-academic students feeling marginalised and underserved, particularly as limited resources and curriculum changes pose further challenges for both educators and students.

“Schools don’t cater for all learning styles. Kids are falling out because it’s not catering to their way of learning. It is still very language based vs. the ‘doing’.”

“Patea and Ōpunake have issues; it’s around our whole schooling system. COVID-19 obviously had some issues, along with things like teacher strikes. But I really believe another part of it is that the whole school system has just really let the entire community down.”

“That’s what’s wrong about our education system. It doesn’t always fit some kids. It’s not meant for them. They don’t thrive in that environment and there are heaps of our kids up the river like that.”

“It’s very focused on the academic rather than vocational, and so you’re setting up so many children to fail so early.”

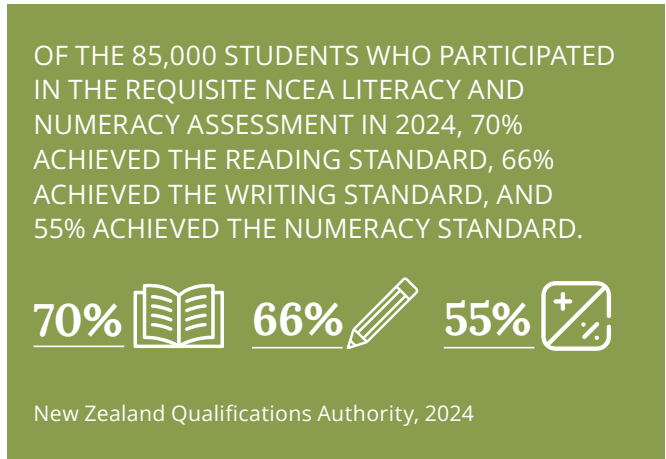
“In order to be classed as intelligent or clever, you need to be able to read and write; it doesn’t acknowledge or value ‘intelligences elsewhere’.”

“What I’m hearing from whānau here in Whanganui City College, with what we’re doing in our curriculum, things are working. The curriculum that we are used to and what parents are used to is a curriculum that’s designed to send kids off to university, but university is an aspiration, and not the reality for some, and they will tell you “I’m not really into university Matua, I just want to be this, I want to do that”.”

“The school tells them they are individuals, but they’re trying to put them in a box.”

“You cannot teach a class with 30 odd children all in the same way. They are not all visual learners, not all academic learners. They can’t just pick up a book and read... and our education system really needs to take a hard look at that.”

“From the educator’s point of view, from what I’m hearing from teachers, is that they’re not getting ministry support to actually understand what they’re supposed to be delivering [with the new curriculum].”



Success in Vocational Pathways

With collaboration between schools, businesses, and tertiary training sectors having significantly improved over the years, some schools across the regions are offering better opportunities for students through valuable work experience programmes, with particular success in vocational training programmes that partner with local providers. These initiatives are viewed by some as practical pathways that benefit students who excel outside traditional academic settings.

“The way that the business sector and tertiary training sectors work with schools now is way better than five, 10, 20 years ago. So there’s a lot of crossover now and working together.”

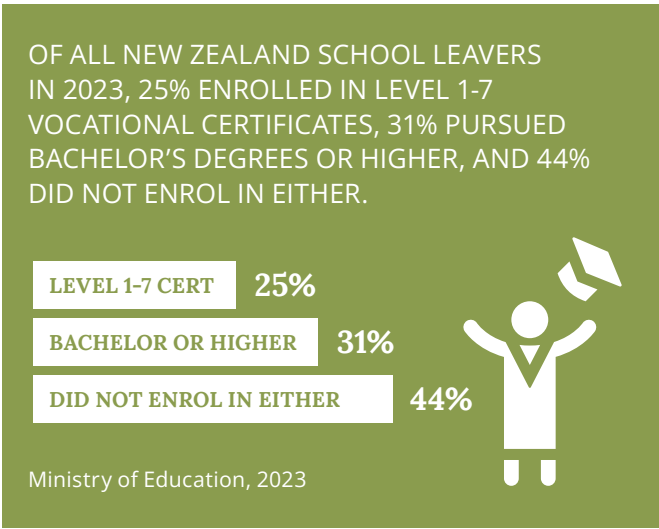
- “There are obviously children or young adults going to school, who don’t want to be stuck in a classroom all day. They want to get into the trades and this is a gateway for them to get into the trades. Whether they come here and do the building course, and then go off and be a plumber or an electrician, you know, the trades are screaming out for people.”
- “The kids are getting an early introduction to what could happen to them in the next 18 months, two years. Actually going into the building and construction side of things, and actually building a house at kura, that’s really cool. It’s changed their outlook on a destination and, not only that, they’re getting qualifications, and credits towards their level two and level three.”
- “It’s pretty satisfying. I remember last week, we had no frames up, because we were waiting for the floor, but then we put them up and everyone was buzzed out at how far they’d got.”

Academic vs. Vocational Pathways

With the growing emphasis on vocational pathways in many local schools, some have concerns about the potential overemphasis on non-academic pathways, which could leave some students lacking essential literacy and numeracy skills and hinder their academic potential.

“Of course we want all children to either go into training or employment when they leave school. But to know the range of options is important. We’ve done a lot of work in vocational pathways... I just hope it’s not been at the expense of traditional academic pathways or whare wānanga.”

- “I’m just hoping now that vocational pathways haven’t become almost a default, where a student is getting a bit tired of school, so ‘I’ll just go do a panel beaters course or building course’.”
- “Does the whole school shift and then more academically minded children then miss out? Then do parents have to pick and choose schools that way?”
- “We see a lot of children being guided into vocational pathways, it could be a teaching issue, as soon as there is an issue they are guided into a vocational pathway.”
- “What I am noticing is to get an NCEA qualification, you need the 10 numeracy, 10 literacy credits. A lot of the young people that I’m seeing, they’ve got plenty of credits, like they have credits coming out of their eyeballs, but they don’t have the basics, so they can’t actually pass NCEA.”



Customised Learning Models

Some schools have been increasingly customising their curricula to better align with students’ needs and experimenting with newer, non-traditional learning models, such as student-led, learner-centred, and open learning approaches. However, the implementation of these models has received mixed feedback from school communities. In the case of the student-led learning model, many have expressed frustration over the lack of community consultation prior to its implementation and raised concerns about its broader suitability. While this model is seen as highly beneficial for self-motivated students, particularly those with strong parental support, it has been less effective for students who lack motivation or require a more structured learning environment.

In the case of learner-centred and open learning approaches, these have been praised for providing highly customised learning experiences but have faced challenges in practical implementation.

Despite these challenges, some parents and educators remain optimistic about the long-term potential of these innovative, non-traditional approaches to education.

“There are kids that do learn well this way [the student-led learning model] and I suppose if anyone’s got the motivation to do it, then they’ll do it. But, if they haven’t, then they will switch off.”

- “There is a lot of innovation around shaping education around kids’ needs and working really flexibly around the students’ needs, so what they are learning at school is relevant.”
- “If you talk to people that have their children there, most of them love it [the student-led learning model]. Most of them think it’s really good that it works for their child.”
- “My personal view is that it’s not necessarily the model that they chose to implement being wrong. It’s the way they [the school] went about it, they didn’t take the community along on the journey.”
- “I was certainly critical of the high school because I didn’t understand their learning methods and I was critical of the high school because they made no effort to explain their learning methods.”

“His mum wants him to stay in school but he hates it, he just doesn’t connect with the model that the school is running on.”

“Everyone’s been given workbooks to work from and do their own research instead of somebody being one on one and the school teaching it, like what they get at boarding schools.”

“That’s an issue that, again, one of those things where, if it doesn’t suit your child, and they’re not doing well in that system, then the only option you’ve got is to send them out of town to either board with family and attend a different school or to become a boarder at a school.”

“As an educator, you don’t have to plan out everything you’re going to teach because you go to the learner “what do you want to learn”. They then feed into it and it’s, gosh, it’s regenerative learning.”

“Trying to be learner-centred in a group of 20-30, that gets watered down pretty quickly.”

“You talk to any teacher or anyone that’s involved in that space that is truly learner-centred, it is very customised and the more challenging the individual is, the more intensive that customisation is.”

“I love their long-term plan at the school, so I have nothing against the school. It’s a new way of learning. It’s open learning. It’s, I think, in five years’ time, it will be brilliant.”

“I have hopes for futuristic thinking, so I love the concept of a not so traditional way of teaching.”

“She’s a pretty diligent kid but it is an open learning environment. I’m not knocking that, but there are kids that struggle with it.”

“I certainly had two clear schools of thought around this one. One being optimistic at the school’s potential and enjoying the non-traditional approach, and then the absolute flip side that it’s too far shifted towards hauora and wellbeing and less towards academic.”

Land-based Education

Some believe that learning from the land offers many benefits, such as fostering mental wellbeing, building a deeper sense of purpose and meaningful relationships, empowering disengaged students by helping them grow and thrive in ways traditional education often cannot, and developing transferable skills that support future career pathways.

However, others share concerns that despite these benefits, the value of connecting with the land is being diminished as societal shifts and modern barriers limit access to quality environmental education.

“The many benefits of being in tune with the environment and gaining wellbeing through learning are being lost as this is not the way things are in today’s hectic world.”

“Over the [land-based education] journey with these amazing young people we witnessed this coming to life, amazing growth, empowerment and liveliness come into kids that were quite disengaged at school, quiet, heads down - kids who the education system doesn’t work for.”

“Those who don’t go on to be farmers are amazing accountants and artists and kura teachers. They take those permaculture learnings to whatever career choice they’ve got.”

“We can bring people here, immerse them in learning how to be kaitiaki of a piece of land, then wherever they go, they take that learning and replicate it someplace else.”

“There are so many benefits. Let’s just start with mental health. Let’s look at teenagers in New Zealand, simply getting everybody outdoors, but especially teenagers, is really important for mental health.”

“It’s called observe and interact in permaculture, observe and interact. I’m on a farm, observing and interacting. I’m in my crappy old farmhouse and I want to renovate it, observe and interact. I’m with a learner, observe and interact. That’s the best result all around.”

Impacts of COVID-19

Many feel that the rapid shift to online education during COVID-19 offered some benefits, such as inclusion for anxious students and increased engagement for typically disengaged students; however, it also highlighted significant challenges. These challenges include inequitable internet access (especially for children in rural and low-income families), a loss of social skill development and motivation to learn, inadequate mental health support, low attendance caused by illness or disengagement, inconsistent and fragmented educational experiences and difficulties re-engaging students in traditional classroom settings.

“Online learning served a purpose, it was out of our control and the schools did their best to provide children an education, at the time you couldn’t really do a lot more really.”

“Inclusion, whilst they had that period at home they could still be included online, minimises that anxiety because they are not having to be face to face.”

“Teaching children online without really justifying it, as a valid form of education, we haven’t had a choice.”

“The children that usually sit at the back of the class, you can’t hide on Zoom.”

“It’s all well saying “yeap, we’ve got a computer at home” so they tick that off but they have nine other people at home and their parents are also working from home and need to use it. One device isn’t enough.”

“It really varies, some schools are very technological, and others are not, and it comes down to money, meaning huge numbers of children are disadvantaged if they don’t have it.”

“Missing out on the interactions children have with each other in a classroom situation, it’s really important, and the less able ones learn a huge amount by being in the social interactions in the classroom.”

“The students that are inspired to learn will take their laptops and get online and they will do it with parental encouragement, but if you haven’t got this at home there is no incentive to jump online and to learn.”

“We’ve chucked them into technology, and we’re trying to bring them out to go participate in the outside world. What do you want?”

“It’s been quite challenging this year in particular, with general attendance, it’s at 70%, that means every kid is away three days every two weeks and for every kid that isn’t away for three days another kid is away for more. A lot of that is sickness, but a lot of it’s also a lack of engagement with schooling and with learning.”

“School is more than about what you’re learning in class, they are missing a whole lot of other things.”

“It’s the children, it’s our next generation that has been impacted by this [Covid-19]. What is the world gonna look like when they’re ruling it? With zero life skills, zero understanding, zero empathy, just broken children in adult bodies.”

“It’s just so hard to make connections when you can’t even see the person’s whole face.”

“How has that been affecting them, not just socially, but mentally and emotionally? They’ve been excluded from things in a time where that’s part of their development as a human, having some way to belong, having self worth and knowing that you’re worth people putting time into you.”

“They provided us some valuable insight around mental health. I think that’s the biggest thing that affected youth through COVID-19, and the lack of support there is for them in that space.”

“Like I said, the opportunities have been curtailed during COVID-19. So, it’s sort of the kids who have become less engaged. “

“We’ve got a gateway student in the business, and she’s 16. She comes to us once a week... She started as a year 9 in COVID-19... Her entire year nine is a write-off, and then years 10 and 11, there were still lots of lockdowns and teacher strikes. She’s now in sixth form... and she was saying, ‘My school experience has been pretty rubbish, I hardly feel like I’ve been there.’”

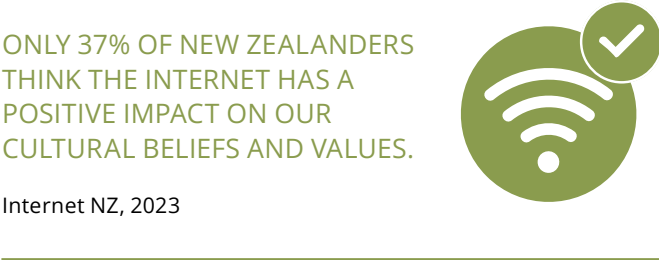
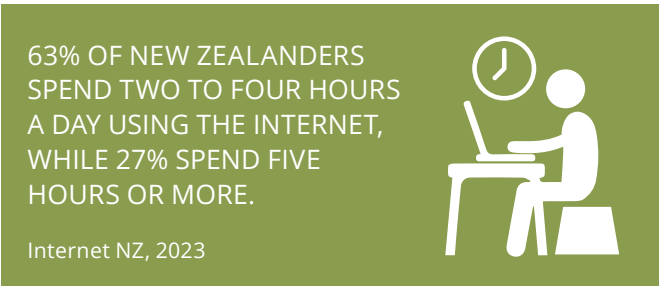
“The anxiety levels following the pandemic have made our children fearful of being in groups, even returning to the school environment.”

Influence of Technology

Some believe that technology offers youth great educational and future employment opportunities (when used appropriately); however, many believe that it is also to blame for the observed behavioural shifts in today’s youth, affecting their attitudes, social engagement, motivation, and ability to concentrate in learning environments.

“Education is a social construct, some may feel that if they are teaching them through technology then they’ll learn faster, but then there is that social development that doesn’t happen. That social development is so important as well.”

- “Online is variable. Some students click into that, some just struggle. Not because they are lazy, they just don’t get it. So there’s that from a straight learning point of view.”
- “We created professional gaming teams with the youth and some of the kaumatua were unhappy with me. But professional gamers as a valid employment pathway, it’s a valid career option.”
- “If you’re good at it [online gaming], which some of these kids are after spending that much time on these games, they’re good at them. It could be a career. But it’s about their education.”
- “They are just not participating in their own life really, it is all just staring at a screen, it drives me nuts.”
- “But onscreen learning, there has been a real switch off from children in the last couple of years. I guess it has no, sort of, novelty now.”
- “I really feel for the teachers too - trying to motivate the children through a screen is really hard.”
- “The whole association with technology with education is possibly a mistake, too soon for a child.”
- “Their reality isn’t reality. But this is the world that they live in. And when they’re sitting in a classroom with 34 other children and a teacher, they’d rather sit there and look at their phones. That’s the reality, our young people are on these [phones].”
- “They don’t stick at things and they you know, like, when I talked earlier about the tech overload, we have such an impulsive generation because they just want that instant gratification that technology gives them.”
- “That is the challenge that I feel we are up against. Technology is creating an inactive nation.”



Sporting Opportunities

Many believe that many schools generally provide accessible sports opportunities that support youth development. However, some are concerned about the limited training teachers receive in physical education, as well as the varying levels of teacher motivation and passion for facilitating sports. These concerns are particularly significant for students from challenging backgrounds, where socioeconomic barriers or logistical difficulties may hinder participation.

“When you go to teachers college, you only do one little part of a module on physical activity. An extremely tiny part of that is physical activity. Yet the expectation is to incorporate that into the daily sessions at school.”

- “For a lot of teachers, it’s an attitude as well. They’d rather just have their kids run around school rather than set up a game that incorporates elements of learning. I just don’t know if the passion is there like it was going back probably eight years.”
- “The high school is kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place in that if you have children from harder backgrounds, where it can be a struggle at times even getting to school, playing sports doesn’t become a focus anymore. It’s just another thing that adds burden to the family.”
- “They [schools] do provide good resources in that space[sports], but I’m not sure about the motivation space. We’re dealing with a lot of kids who we’re reconnecting back into sports because they’re not getting their motivation at school.”
- “There are a lot of really excellent sporting groups in Taumarunui and there’s a lot of really good sports places just down the road which is fantastic... but if you don’t do it in your township the kids won’t have access unless the school covers it.”
- “I think it’s part of New Zealand culture, there seems to be this sort of understanding that sports are hugely important, right from when kids are little, you know, you’ve got to get your kids into sport. You’ve got to spend your weekends doing that. Because it’s really good for their mental health, it’s really good for their fitness and it’s really good for their social interaction, you know?”



Free Food in Schools

Many feel that the school meal programmes, including free breakfasts, lunches, and fruit provisions, are beneficial for promoting student learning, improving student behaviour, and reducing food insecurity.

However, some share concerns around issues such as food wastage due to poor food quality, financial strain on families during school holidays, and the impact on local food providers including some closures of successful community initiatives due to being replaced by large-scale government providers.

“If our children are eating better, if they turn up to school fed, they do better [at school]. Fruits in school and school lunch programmes need to continue because those children do better.”

“Certainly for kids learning and stuff, being able to go to school and have a full tummy is important”.
“We do have the school breakfast and lunch programme in Taihape which is great. It stopped a lot of the problems that arose out of children coming to school with no lunch which resulted in some bullying.”
“We have [free] school lunches. We also have [free] breakfast in schools... Since they’ve been doing breakfasts in schools, we’ve noticed that it’s actually moved them up in their achievement and their behaviour has changed.”
“That’s why the free lunches were brought in. With the whole effect of these kids coming to school hungry and not being able to concentrate and all the rest of it.”
“I love the approach to it. It’s very community and life skills focussed. So you’ve got the kids, they make the menu for the week and they make the kai. So whether that’s a spaghetti toasty, this is something that the kids are gonna eat.”
“What really grinds my gears around those lunches in schools. Great. But how many families would have struggled over this Christmas break to make sure they had enough food in their house to feed them what they would have been fed in school?”

“During school they are saving \$80 a week, not buying lunches for their kids. But, then when it comes to the holidays, how do they re-budget and afford buying the right type of food for their kids so that they can eat during the holiday period.”
“Those school lunches, it depends who’s creating it but it’s like second grade hospital food that I wouldn’t even feed my dog.”
“Some of it’s gross and it’s getting worse. Compass is our provider; they also provide to hospitals and it’s... not good.”
“The breakfasts in schools, there is a lot of waste. My little grandchildren live in a house where they can afford to feed their children, so my grandchildren are fussy and they are in an environment where a lot of their friends are fussy too, so there is a lot of waste.”
“The Kai Kitchen in Hawera started to help out with that situation and that was getting really well used, Kai Kitchen would deliver lunches for about 50% of our schools until the government system came in... which is a bit of a shame because that’s killed that cause.”
“The government was making it hard because they had to have a certain licence in order to be doing that [school lunches]. So that was probably the biggest impact on something that was working so well.”
“Then there was a local cafe, Tika Catering. They were providing lunches. They always loved Tika and hated Subway and Pita Pit. They brought their Subway home to me once and it was pretty disgusting, just lettuce in it, soggy, yucky, disgusting.”
“They trust the community like Tika Catering, who know how to make good food for kids. The other options were horrendous.”

KA ORA, KA AKO PROVIDES FREE HEALTHY LUNCHES TO STUDENTS IN APPROXIMATELY 40% OF NEW ZEALAND’S PRIMARY, INTERMEDIATE, AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND KURA, WITH AN ESTIMATED COST-BENEFIT RATIO OF 2.5 TO 7 TIMES, FOR EVERY DOLLAR SPENT.

Ministry of Education, 2024; Public Health Communication Centre, 2024.



2.5-7X
COST BENEFIT
FOR EVERY DOLLAR SPENT

Focus on School Leadership & Culture

Some believe that building a strong, values-driven school culture is essential for driving meaningful change within school environments. Additionally, some believe that effective leadership is critical in creating a school environment where students are empowered to learn, grow, and succeed.

“I’ve gradually come to understand that culture sort of trumps everything if you want to bring change.”

“[A local school] went through a rough period of 10 or 15 years where it didn’t really seem to stand for anything. It wasn’t that bad. There was no crisis that hadn’t sort of bottomed out, or anything like that, but didn’t really stand for anything.”
“The school culture, it felt very bland, very mediocre, very low expectations.”
“If you walked around the school, there were no distinguishing factors really, that made it look as though it was different to any other school.”
“That’s what we [a local school] have been working on now. We’ve developed a whole new sort of core purpose, vision, values, and they really mean something to the school, and they are a real benchmark from which we determined all our decisions.”
“The leadership of a school makes more difference than you would ever imagine it possibly could.”
“We’ve got some principals in Whanganui who are the greatest heroes of our community.”
“Many of the principles we interact with through our social workers in schools, they are just absolutely outstanding.”
“It’s an up and down journey, dependent on leadership and the principal.”

A Whānau-based Approach

Some believe that success for children at school relies on strong support from whānau (family) and dedicated staff, emphasising close relationships, open communication, and a whānau-based teaching approach where teachers know each child well, collaborate with families, and build trust to support each child’s journey from early childhood through secondary school.

“We put the kids on a whānau education plan. And right from year nine, what is your dream job? What do you want to do? And we track, we track with the parents.”

“Kids that do well are really well supported by their parents and family.”
“The kids and the whānau here are the most important things. The other vital cog in the wheel is the staff.”
“Our whānau, they have a say at this place. The things that are important to them need to be known by us and they are a big part of who we are and what we’re doing right here.”
“It’s all about building up trust with the people that send their products to my school. How we work with you, how we engage with the parents. How do we continue to engage with them, with the parents and the whānau, because it doesn’t stop.”
“When I talk about whānau based, it’s all about treating your kids as your family.”
“If we get to know them, and get to know their story, all I’ve got to worry about are the kids in my whānau class. Because when I teach my PE, let’s say, they’ve already been captured by their whānau teacher. So the teaching is simple, because I’m going to be talking to that whānau teacher, and saying, how does, how does Sam rock and roll? What’s his story?”
“I’m putting the work into my whanau class. I’m expecting the other teachers to be doing the same. So therefore the communication is quite easy. Tell me about Tom, tell me about Rachel, if I want to know, she’s in my PE class, and what’s up? What’s going on there?”
“In our staff room, we’ll sometimes have whānau teachers stand up and say, Tamatea is not in a good space today. So, if his head rises in your class, send him to me. Or so-in-so’s father passed away and I’m just letting you know so that everyone is in the loop.”
“So the whānau time is the form time and we’ve got 1 hour where the whānau teacher is with them, looking at their achievements, if you’re a senior, looking at prospects or future.”

Education Industry Skills Shortage

Many feel the severe skills shortage in the education sector has made it difficult to recruit and retain qualified, passionate teachers, particularly in rural areas. This has resulted in an overworked and undervalued workforce, struggling to meet diverse student needs and impacting the quality of education.

“Teachers are too busy to build meaningful relationships with kids.”

- “I know that teachers work really hard to make sure all children in their classrooms achieve the skills and knowledge they need.”
- “Even retaining qualified staff at the moment. I’ve been advertising for a year for a qualified teacher.”
- “Skill shortage, that’s salary. Healthcare, skilled workers, teaching, it’s the salary to pay for these professionals. If you have a better salary you might get a better source of employees.”
- “It is never easy to get well qualified staff to come to rural areas, that is the other thing.”
- “At high school level it gets tricky with quality teachers. We do have that in our district, but they’re limited.”
- “It’s not to say that people haven’t had good intentions... some people do have good intentions. As for some of the other teachers at that school, you just want to say, ‘honestly, you are in the wrong job, mate’.”
- “I feel so sorry for them because they are teachers, come social workers, come mothers, come parents, because of what’s happened with our children.”

IN 2023, 24% OF TEACHER POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN NEW ZEALAND RECEIVED NO SUITABLE APPLICANTS.

Post Primary Teachers Association, 2023

Lack of Teacher Aid Support

Whilst many believe that teacher aides play an important role in building relationships with students and providing the time and support teachers often cannot, there is concern about the lack of adequate funding, resources, and specialised training for teacher aides, particularly for supporting students with learning disabilities or behavioural challenges. Many feel this significantly impacts schools’ ability to meet individual student needs, often leading to or exacerbating underachievement, exclusion, or disengagement.

“Teacher aids, they do get to build relationships with these children in schools, because they’ve got time. And it’s these relationships that keep these children afloat.”

- “This is why teacher aids are just awesome. You latch on to the right kid and give that kid a little bit of a boost, to look forward while they’re still in school. That’s time teachers don’t have.”
- “Once they start behind, they stay behind, the gap that just keeps getting bigger [kids that may start with a language deficit].”
- “I’ve got a special needs child, and you have to fight, and fight, and fight, and fight for funding. It’s a never ending job.”
- “They were not supported in class and there was no support for the mum.”
- “If this unit and the high school wasn’t here, they [students with learning disabilities] would just be in the mainstream [system]. They probably wouldn’t have the same support as what they get from the care advisory...to be honest, I don’t know where they would be if it wasn’t for the advisory here in the high school. I’m not too sure where the support would come from.”
- “There isn’t that support pathway for kids in primary school that then leads them into high school to be [fully] engaged, especially if they’re neuro-diverse or suffering from ADHD. There isn’t that continuation or pathway to help them achieve.”
- “The alternatives aren’t there, and the support behind the alternatives is not there, so they get dropped off the list and swept out.”
- “Some of those classrooms are quite huge as well where the students just get lost, so the ones with a learning disability are just another number in that classroom, they don’t actually learn anything and struggle to get their NCEA levels.”

Bullying in Schools

Some feel that bullying is a widely reported issue in certain schools, with incidents leading families to seek alternative schooling options for safety reasons. A perceived lack of disciplinary authority for teachers is believed to contribute to school dysfunction and unsafe learning environments, prompting worries about teachers leaving the profession.

“The bullying at school is shocking. I know of a few families that have taken their kids out of [the school] and sent them away to boarding school, even though they can’t afford it, just to get them out of there.”

- “Then it’s ‘oh, we can’t do anything,’ but it was right under the noses of the teachers.”
- “From what I see, teachers don’t have the power to give consequences... It’s pretty dysfunctional.”
- “There’s a real issue with our teachers being unable to handle these situations. I know of teachers who are leaving because they have to give nine warnings, which then carries over to the next day, to a troublesome child, who is going out of their way to disrupt the whole class.”
- “It will not be safe to be a teacher with a lot of our social issues. I know it sounds dramatic, but I’m at the point where I’ve got children now. Liz has grandchildren in the same situation.”

Students Getting Expelled

Some express concerns about a significant gap in support for expelled or struggling students, particularly those under 16, leaving many without adequate resources. Additionally, some schools are seen as the ‘dumping ground’ for unwanted students, which is leading to unsafe environments and escalating challenges.

“We all know that schools are under-resourced so once a young person is stood down from school there is a big gap before anyone actually picks them up, if anybody picks them up.”

- “There’s usually a reason why they’re expelled from school and often, no matter where you put them, it’s gonna follow them.”
- “There is definitely a gap in support. We’ve got MSD that has the Youth Services section but not everybody is being caught.”
- “If you’re 11, 12, 13, 14 and struggling in terms of education, what support is there for you at that point? Verses, there’s quite a lot for 16 upwards.”
- “We have a few schools in the middle that end up the dumping ground and historically have been the dumping ground for the kids that no one else will have...so there are terrible behaviours in those schools, you know, weapons going to school, principals being assaulted, horrendous stuff happens at those schools. It’s this ugly snowball.”

IN 2022, 1.13 OUT OF EVERY 1,000 STUDENTS WERE EXPELLED FROM NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS.

Education Counts, 2022



Students Leaving School Early

There is a prevalent concern in many rural communities that some youth leave school too early to enter the workforce, often to support family farms or because of economic pressures in their families. This leads to missed educational opportunities and skill development, as students prioritise immediate employment over obtaining educational qualifications.

Many believe this trend is influenced by intergenerational attitudes toward schooling, the high availability of local job opportunities, and limited motivation or support for continued education.

“Sometimes getting qualifications isn’t as important as getting a job.”

- “There is a lot of physical traditional work, the men of the community are out there working, and that is where the boys want to be.”
- “Every child’s needs are different, for some it is right to leave early, and for some it is not.”
- “I don’t want my kids leaving school and going to nothing, man. If they’re leaving school because they just want to leave school, that’s not good enough for me.”
- “A large number of students are also having to leave school early to find a job in Taihape which is alarming.”
- “We’ve got three [saw] mills here, so there are avenues of employment, so children get to 15 and find a pathway, and that’s why we only have half a dozen year 13’s here at the school.”
- “At 17 if I got offered \$50k a year, I’m out there earning the big bucks.”
- “Stay at school until you get a job’ is actually much more prevalent, I found, in Marton, than other schools I’ve worked in.”
- “What the principal from Taumarunui was saying is that the kids are leaving early because they are kind of almost expected to go out and find a job to support their families instead of going to that higher level of education.”

- “If you have a household where you don’t earn enough money to survive, and you have an eldest child who can leave school, not get their qualifications but go out and earn money for the household...”
- “A lot of them do that because there are opportunities to make money, so why would I stay at school when I could be earning good money.”
- “We have a lot of youth pulling out of school. We have many truancy issues which we’re still trying to address as a community.”



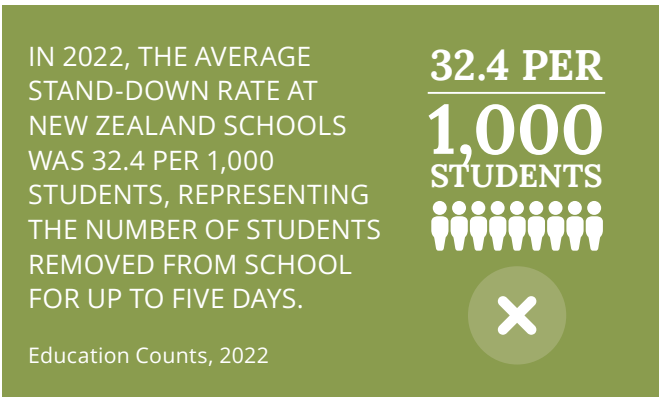
Limited Support for Students Struggling at School

Some believe that many young people face unresolved trauma, which can hinder their academic engagement and contribute to behavioural issues, disengagement, and mental health struggles at school. Further to this, there is a perception that some schools believe they can support these students on their own and are resistant to accepting additional support from external providers. As a result, students facing these struggles often fall through the cracks due to limited school support systems.

“We try, and try again with schools who won’t welcome our [youth] support services in their schools.”

- “It’s almost like the teachers are giving up [trying to help kids with complex trauma], it’s in the too hard basket.”
- “They haven’t engaged in school. They haven’t engaged in anything in school. They haven’t necessarily done well in school, but they haven’t done badly; they ghost.”
- “You see that when you’re driving to work. You see these kids; a lot of them just look like they’re walking a death sentence. You know, they’re just disengaged from life.”
- “I remember one of the secondary trends we are seeing is the mental health of our youth today. It’s also impacting their ability to engage with education.”
- “What I’ve identified, more so as a parent, but also within my role in the community, is these troubled youth at school, a lot of them are attending school, but they’re just causing havoc in school. They’re the naughty kids who have been ostracised and pushed away...”
- “Unfortunately, some schools just feel they are doing okay on their own, and don’t need the support of external providers.”

- “School counselling, you have to go at lunchtime and it disconnects children from their peers.”
- “When you’ve got one school counsellor to a few hundred children, it’s just not sustainable. How are you going to be able to support that many children? It’s just not how it should be.”
- “I definitely know kids fall through the cracks, being a youth counsellor, and there is not a lot of support in schools.”



Challenges at Home

Many believe that challenges within the home environment, such as inadequate parental support, poverty, substance abuse, food insecurity, financial hardships, family violence, and a lack of positive role models, significantly impede youth’s educational progress, work ethic, and motivation. As a result, these challenges often contribute to truancy, early school dropouts, and poor academic outcomes.

“The upbringing will hold them back; their attitude to work, their attitude to taking instruction, and then you get into competence and literacy.”

“It is not just the high school, it’s education in general. It is the parents just as much as the teachers. Because a lot of our parents, they’re already struggling with school. So if they’re really struggling, they don’t want to show their kids that they’re not that good at it.”

“You can see why some of the children are reacting the way they are. It is due to parents being under stress. They are financially strained. They struggle with drugs and alcohol.”

“It isn’t as simple as they’re misbehaving because it’s Wednesday and they feel like putting people off. They’ve got a huge amount of stuff going on, they’re going to school hungry, they come from a night where there’s been family harm. Of course they’re going to get to school and fall apart.”

“Around the family situations, it might mean that mum or dad are not awake, they could be hungover, or there are lots of reasons and just not motivated to take their kids to school.”

“My girl took out the year nine academic award. But I am on her all the time. I am on the school all the time. So, if you don’t have parents like that, supporting the young people, of course you’re not going to have the results you want.”

“If you’re coming from an environment where there is trauma, you’re not succeeding as well as you could in school, and your university entrance is based on your performance at school. A lot of kids miss out on tertiary education because of that. New Zealand’s got a lot of trauma.”

“It’s just the dysfunction. I could spend all of my time saying ‘that starts in the home’, but I know that things aren’t any better at the school... there is a lot of dysfunction. Youth are in a constant survival mode.”

Smaller Rural Schooling

Whilst some believe that rural schooling offers unique benefits like close-knit community relationships, small class sizes, and a focus on essential life skills, others share concerns that limited secondary school options and the high cost of alternative schools leave some families with few options, making local options a necessity despite potential drawbacks.

“Because the principal and the teachers have such a close relationship with the parents, the kids actually have to get it together. There’s no hiding.”

“I’ve taught in small schools, as well as two to four teacher schools. Our children went on to take leadership opportunities in the secondary schools in New Plymouth because they had to mix very well. You have to find ways of working out how to be friends with everybody because you can’t be cliquey; there’s not enough children to do that.”

“We don’t have the necessary primary, intermediate, and high schools in each of our towns.”

“We have very little choice. There’s not really anything else I can say, other than, we are in trouble with our education. I feel we are in trouble.”

“So, as a parent of children looking at going to school, what are my choices? I’ve got to travel. I’ve got to pay for boarding fees to go an hour away, which we’re not in the financial situation to do. The travel to and from, that’s unreasonable.”

“They do seem to smoke down there quite a bit, which is quite surprising because they cost 5 bucks a cigarette.”

“Cost has a lot to do with it, although it hasn’t stopped me it has stopped a lot of people.”

Seeking Schooling Elsewhere

With many families in more rural regions, especially those with farming backgrounds, choosing to send their children to schools outside their local areas due to perceived better academic, sporting, and extracurricular opportunities, many share concerns that this leaves behind students who are more likely to struggle, particularly those from lower-income families, and potentially impacts local schools’ enrolment and quality.

“The struggle is so much harder for the children that do really well in our schools, than the others, it is harder to succeed.”

“It’s not that there are not able students here, it’s that the most able students are more likely to go out of the area for their education.”

“It’s a real issue that our youth are going away to school because our three colleges are not considered... if you can afford a better option, people wouldn’t consider them, this is a big issue in our communities.”

“Parents are concerned about the quality of the high school education and small high schools, the choices they are able to provide are more limited.”

“I sent my daughter to school in Feilding to be in a stronger and more challenging academic environment.”

“Those that can afford it [private schooling outside of the region] have the option, those who can’t, don’t.”

“So many people leave town, either the whole family relocates or they are sending kids off to boarding school. We’re losing the better quality kids all the time.”

“We’ve got about 45 kids in boarding schools throughout New Zealand. We get them out of our community because our high school is not up to the level of standard.”

“It falls away when children are sent away for education. You identify leaders in children pretty quickly, which means usually those that learn leadership at a young age are the captains of their sport, and are the same demographic of children that have been sent away at the moment. We’re not retaining those children.”

“So I think once kids get older, the quality of schooling provided declines. So, a lot of people are sending the kids off to get secondary education elsewhere. I get it.”

“It worries me but we’re not in a position to want to send our kids away for education because we choose not to afford it. And it’s not affordability just with money, it’s the affordability of time. Having to drop them off, having to pick them up, we don’t have that time to do that, we aren’t able to commit to doing that, so we can’t afford it.”

“For a number of their families, that’s just simply not affordable and not an option. So they don’t have a choice of moving them out of the system, they are stuck in that system.”

“Yeah, if you’ve got the money you send your kids elsewhere to school, and that’s just a fact of life.”

“One area that is maybe not as well-known is scholarships, you know, for kids whose parents can’t afford it, but they might be talented, particularly at sport. But that again, they [scholarships] are not equitable; you’ve got to be good at sport to get that opportunity.”

“I know of a few people at New Plymouth Boys High School, in the boarding school environment, because they’re elite in sport. They would have had the opportunity to play their sports in Ōpunake but not necessarily get on the global stage.”

“He knew what we wanted to do early on, and Hāwera High School didn’t have a curriculum around that, whereas New Plymouth Boys did. So it was simply the subject choices.”

“Particularly in rural [areas], they send their kids to boarding schools, whether that’s in New Plymouth or Whanganui. So, a lot of rural farming families send their kids, even to Manawatu. But that’s obviously not an option for everyone.”

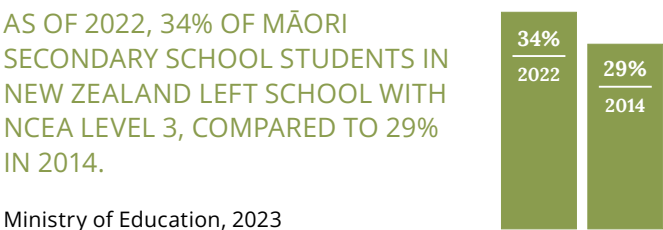
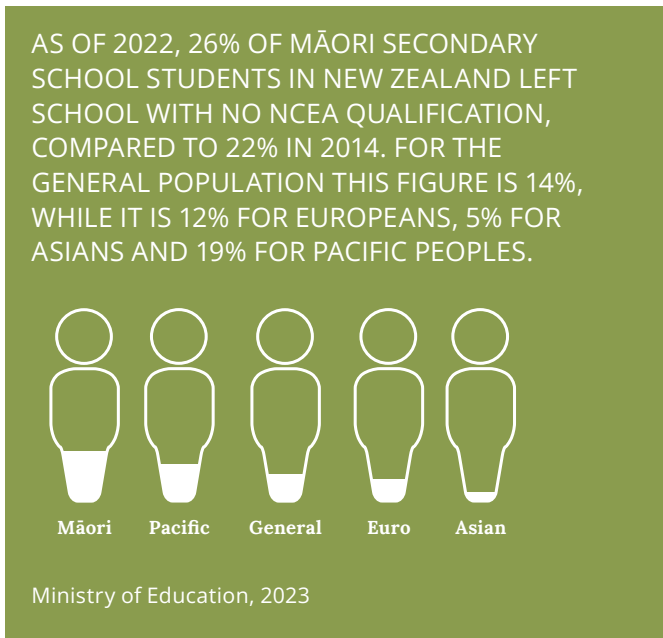
Better Education Outcomes for Maori

Many believe significant strides have been made in improving educational opportunities and cultural integration for Māori students. Increased Māori leadership in teaching roles, active Iwi involvement in education, and a stronger focus on Te Reo Māori and New Zealand history in schools have fostered a more inclusive and supportive environment for Māori students and greater inclusivity for Māori in broader student communities.

“Māori is being far more professionally taught in schools and engaged with by the students than it was 10 to 15 years ago.”

- “That’s a good thing, everyone regardless of their race should have the same opportunities.”
- “If you’re a kid and you see people like you in positions of leadership and authority, then that becomes more relatable.”
- “Iwi are playing a big part in trying to get whānau involved in becoming a part of their kids’ education.”
- “Some of those incentives or initiatives developed for Māori in education are having some good outcomes.”
- “There’s a lot of Māori in the teaching space, Māori schools, kura, and Māori principals. Maybe there’s just a bit more integration.”
- “I always notice some of the most outstanding students we deal with from the local high school are Māori or Polynesian, and usually women, the leaders.”
- “The new curriculum will be a good thing to allow our children, our Māori children, to feel more connected. It will be around New Zealand history and the context of what comes with that and how schools chose to teach that.”
- “My observation of the groups milling around recently was that groups were mixed, there weren’t explicit Māori or Pākehā groups of children.”
- “I don’t think the kids see a difference. In lots of ways. The adults are all segregated and isolated, the kids aren’t. They’re reall integrated. They don’t differentiate between them.”

- “So there’s not any kind of disapproval towards that happening now. So the kids are free to be friends with whoever they want, whereas maybe our parents’ generation, unfortunately, were a little bit more judgmental.”
- “When we see the awards evenings, there’s just as many Māori as Pākehā, it’s good.”
- “There are a lot of examples of this gap being broken and reduced in sporting in particular - from that, they are going to achieve also in the classrooms!”



Māori-medium Schools

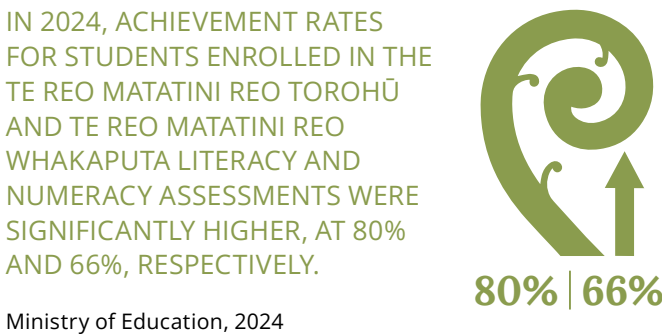
In some regions, there is notable growth in Māori-medium schools, praised for their smaller class sizes, tailored teaching approaches, and strong cultural connections. Some feel that their success is driven by their deep connections to Iwi, whānau support, and an unapologetic embrace of tikanga, which helps students develop a strong sense of identity and confidence.

Whilst some believe Māori-medium schools face challenges with integration into the broader education system, and limited extracurricular opportunities, like team sports, due to their size, they continue to thrive, offering immersive experiences, continuity from early childhood through secondary education, and a supportive environment that fosters individual attention.

“They are unapologetic about their tikanga, these kids stand up and they know who they are, and that’s what makes them strong.”

- “I feel like in Taranaki, there are predominantly Māori schools. There is a higher percentage of Māori compared to other ethnicities. I think there are also quite prominent schools around the coast... We’re seeing growth in those in the kura schools. So that’s quite encouraging, actually.”
- “The intermediate has become the local kura for Māori and Iwi. So they have been able to extend into senior classes and continue right through from Kōhanga Reo, right through to high school age, which is fantastic for those students, that they can continue with their Māori learning and being engaged at their level with their own people.”
- “The Māori kura that we have available allows for our kids to be a bit more well catered for, and that opportunity. The fewer numbers make it a bit more achievable, that we get better rates, in comparison.”
- “With Māori, there’s a lot more opportunities in subjects that we provide for, catered for, in terms of differentiated educational opportunities. They’re trying to look outside of the box.”

- “Kura kaupapa, we have two, Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāruahine, they are well supported because their whānau are so connected. They are very strong and connected, and unapologetic about who they are and what they do – it’s awesome. It is what makes them so successful.”
- “We’ve got very strong Iwi, so Ngāruahine and Ngāti Ruanui, Ngaa Rauru, and I think they bring together their own to enable people to feel safe to be able to learn.”
- “The Iwi are very much behind education for Māori in this area, so they have a lot of initiatives themselves to promote and engage rangatahi as well. Particularly Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāruahine. So I think they understand and want to do best for all Māori, so they are certainly having an impact alongside rangatahi.”
- “I think the increase of kura kaupapa is more to do with picking up that influx of our Māori kids getting kicked out of mainstream [schools].”
- “I think it got to a point where it was impacting staff’s wellbeing with the influx of tamariki. But as they didn’t want to leave these kids without education, they took them all. They are mentally overworked.”
- “One area, I think, will improve as they grow, certainly from a sporting perspective as the kids get older, there may be less opportunity for team sports in the small kura.”



Continued Challenges for Māori Students

Whilst some improvements in Māori student achievement are acknowledged, many Māori students continue to face significant barriers in mainstream schooling, including low academic expectations, curriculum misalignment (often neglecting the cultural and spiritual needs of Māori students), intergenerational attitudes, and other systemic barriers such as racism. For many, this is leading to disengagement from their school systems, and leaving school without qualifications due to limited support. Despite all of this, some Māori continue to succeed ‘against the odds’ which itself can be challenging.

“These are 15 year olds, 16 year olds, being told that from a teacher, that you are too dumb, what a way to ruin someone’s self-esteem.”

“I think one of the biggest issues with education and our community is definitely failing our Māori students in mainstream schools. We have had a massive increase of rangatahi Māori being shoved into a box to the side.”

“Mainstream structures, they forget the wairua side of things, that is lost in the teaching. It is just instructional.”

“At [a local school] they have about an 80% roll of Māori, and a lot of those children go to the school but gain no education while they are there because they feel a lot of the stuff they are being taught is irrelevant or they have no connection to it.”

“I’m just wondering if what we are teaching to our children, especially our Māori children, is relevant for them when they leave school?”

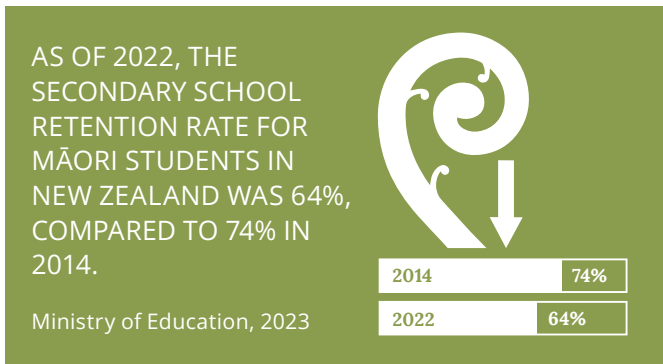
“100%, if I grew up being told ‘you’re pretty smart for a Māori’, how many of the kids have been told that throughout our country?”

“The mindset is prevalent throughout their entire life. The entire school system. Being told that, that’s pretty hard. That’s a pretty hard barrier to get past.”

“I’ll give you an example, at the high school, my daughter pointed out that her class is mostly Māori, she’s Māori, and they have the poorest internet service in the whole school. The class that has the best access in her year, has the majority of white students. The fact that she pointed that out to me was a big concern to me.”

“Just to reinforce that, Kōkori have taken on quite a few students and school leavers and most of them, I’d say about 80% to 90% of them, were told that they’re too dumb, and that is what led them to disengage from school and not return.”

“If you are one of the people that is succeeding against all odds, how does that make you feel watching the rest of your friends fall away? It can’t feel good, can it? It’s not a ‘woohoo, I made it’, it’s a feeling of sad for everybody.”



Lack of Career Guidance in Schools

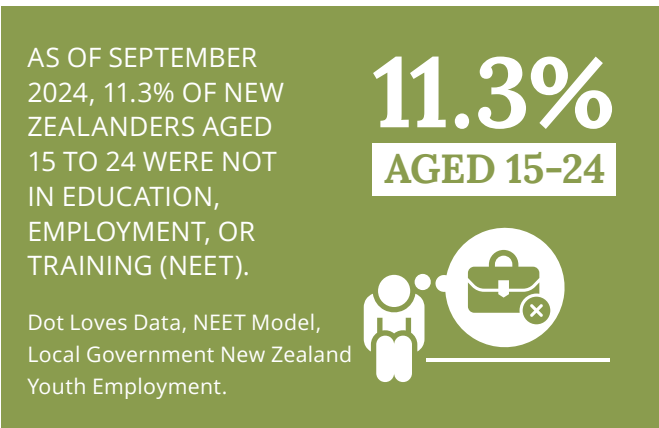
Some feel that youth face overwhelming career choices and pressure to decide their futures at a young age. Schools often fail to provide adequate support, guidance, or exposure to diverse pathways, such as vocational and creative fields, which can lead to poorly informed career decisions.

“Most of the schools I have been to have been information disseminators. They just get the brochures from the universities or from the training organisation and give those out. That’s really all they can manage. They can’t do any sustained career counselling, or advice.”

“There is designated funding for career advisers but it’s minimal. It works out about one or two hours a week.”

“Maybe there’s not enough promotion of what’s available in the schools.”

“The school system needs a big overhaul to get people into the trades, swinging a hammer around or something creative.”



Setting Students Up for Work (and Life)

Many share concerns that education is not adequately preparing youth for the workforce, with significant gaps in vocational readiness and essential life skills such as problem solving, resilience and adaptability, leaving young people often unprepared to handle workplace challenges. Some believe that parents may also be struggling to support their children to develop these skills, often relying solely on schools to teach these, further compounding this issue.

“The issue that I identified was that youth don’t know how to prepare a CV and they don’t know how to prepare for an interview.”

“Our young people are not ready for work, they are not ready for life. It goes back to support they might be able to gain at schools, healthy relationships, resilience, all of that. If they are not being modelled to them, how do they learn it?”

“I had a bit of life experience behind me but somebody who’s fresh out of school or pretty young wouldn’t have the tools to deal with a big company where they’re in an unsafe space.”

“Also, if someone hasn’t been exposed well at school, they don’t know how to learn properly. So, therefore, when they reach something they don’t know how to do in their workplace, they quit quite quickly, then move on.”

“They never go outside their box, never challenge themselves, never think ‘so why do I do that, why do I think that’. So what that means, is they leave, then get employment and at any point of difficulty, they leave again.”

“They haven’t been taught how to problem-solve or critically think about something. Then they get into this pattern of ‘no one is going to employ me’.”

“Learning these so-called ‘soft skills’ is actually a priority, it’s no less than hard skills. Unless children learn how to adapt, learn how to problem solve, develop a way to be resilient, they will suffer. That will take away options just as much as not having a particular qualification.”

“There is the sense, where a lot of families now default that that’s the school’s responsibility.”

“The rangatahi quite often see the barriers before they see what the opportunity really is. So they might see an opportunity. And it might be an application process, or they might have to have an interview, or it puts them off from doing something.”

Pathways Forward: Opportunities to Address Disparities in Secondary Education

With a solid understanding of the secondary education landscape, we now focus on identifying pathways for progress. The “Pathways Forward: Opportunities for Addressing Secondary Education Outcomes” section aims to highlight the emerging opportunities identified by the community, media and national research, as well as successful models, interventions, and organisations from Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world. With this, our goal is to inspire and empower people at all levels to start or strengthen their efforts toward better secondary education outcomes.

At the end of this collection, we expand on one specific opportunity that was frequently mentioned by our sources and believed to hold significant potential for positive impact. Turn to the ‘Highlighted Opportunity for Action’ on page 140 to learn more.

Alternative and Holistic Education Spaces

Creating alternative, inclusive and holistic education spaces and learning approaches that integrate skills-based learning, work experiences, social support, and trauma-informed environments to engage youth who may struggle in traditional school settings, especially for neurodiverse students.

- Community Insights:
- “If we had more opportunities for young people to engage in education that wasn’t high school, but in a more holistic or approachable way, where it was some education, some work. Then we would have more engagement.”
 - “If you run an alternative education program, it’s got to be, you got to be on site at school, they still got to be involved in the school.”
 - “We set up Te Arawa, which is an alternative education platform from my school. They’re in the cricket pavilion. That’s the classroom. Mondays and Tuesdays. They get teachers from the school to come and teach them numeracy, literacy, health and wellbeing, etc, etc. Wednesday, they got a catch up day and Thursday, Friday, they usually are on a course that we put them on.”
 - “Alternative education is education for kids who don’t fit into the school, who’ve been excluded from the school.”
 - “Especially being someone who is neurodiverse, I know that people engage differently and simply knowing, you know, this is the format, doesn’t actually work for a lot of kids. There have to be holistic and tactile options for kids and not just at the high school level either.”
 - “A lot of our kids are in that space. A lot of those kids are disengaged. And it’s a no-brainer, right? Put them in a different place, or put them in a different space.”

FEATURED GOOD MAHI

Learning Environment

Where: Whanganui, Aotearoa New Zealand

Description: Learning Environment is a Whanganui-based organisation dedicated to fostering educational growth and meaningful experiences for rangatahi (youth). They deliver STAR workshops, NCEA-accredited courses, and youth-focused programmes such as Te Hoeroa, which support personal and academic development. They also offer school visits, which bring hands-on learning opportunities directly to local kura kaupapa Māori, primary, intermediate, and high schools. With a focus on cultural values, forward thinking teaching practices, and student engagement, Learning Environment creates deep educational experiences designed to empower learners’ lifelong success (Learning Environment New Zealand, 2024).

“Our transformative learning experiences create systemic change by integrating mental wellbeing with immersion in te taiao [the natural world] and community contexts” (Learning Environment New Zealand, 2024).

“Within the Learning Environment, we facilitate multidisciplinary learning experiences that engage the whole person, empower learners, and offer opportunities for the development of skills and knowledge” (Learning Environment New Zealand, 2024).



FEATURED GOOD MAHI

Eco School

Where: Whanganui, Aotearoa New Zealand

Description: The Eco School is dedicated to making sustainability education accessible to everyone, with a focus on permaculture and forest schooling. Its forest schooling programmes, including nature play in schools and forest school teacher training, are rooted in a Forest School philosophy that emphasises inquiry-based learning, deep connections to natural spaces, and achievement through taking small risks. Grounded in the values of wonder, kaitiakitanga (guardianship), and joy, The Eco School inspires learners to unlock their potential, care for the environment, and create lasting memories through meaningful experiences in nature (The Eco School, 2024).

“What we tried to do is make high-quality environmental education affordable to everybody. No barrier to high-quality learning... Children from all schools should be able to be outdoors on a farm learning all the time. We remove barriers to participation. And on our farm, we try to practice best practice land management. And we follow that up with best practice education” (The Eco School, 2024).

“There are so many benefits. Let’s just start with mental health. Let’s look at teenagers in New Zealand, simply getting everybody outdoors, but especially teenagers, is really important for mental health” (The Eco School, 2024).



Enhancing Academic Pathways

Enhancing academic pathways by making them more engaging, interactive, and appealing to inspire greater interest in academia among children.

Community Insights:

“You can do a lot of stuff, like science, in a cooler way, rather than what they have right now...I just don’t think they’ve looked at what’s right.”

“So if you don’t read or write well, if you got a repair manual for a Harley Davidson motorbike engine, you can learn how to read because it’s something that you’re really interested in. Yeah, whatever pathway it takes.”

“I think more children would take up academia if that became cooler, funner and more interactive.”

Flexible and Needs-based School System

Creating a more flexible, learner-centered school system that empowers students to shape their own educational pathways, addressing diverse individual needs and fostering personal growth.

Community Insights:

“The formal school system, subjects and curriculum does not meet the needs of most of the kids... so how do we create a lot of flexibility and responsiveness?”

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Big Picture Learning

Location: United States of America

Year Implemented: 1995

Description: Big Picture Learning (BPL) is an educational model that places students at the centre of their own learning experiences, focusing on personalised, student-interest-driven, real-world education. By tailoring learning to each student and integrating academic study with hands-on, practical experiences, the model fosters critical thinking, teamwork, and self-direction. It empowers students to take ownership of their education while equipping them with the skills, confidence, and support needed for future success (Big Picture Learning, 2024; Next School, 2024; Transcend Education, 2024). The model has been implemented in numerous schools across the United States and internationally, highlighting its success (Big Picture Learning, 2024).

“Big Picture puts a huge emphasis on real world learning. From a young age students gain an understanding of the real world economy, industries and careers” (Next School, 2024).

“Big Picture Learning was founded on the premise that students should learn by working on ‘real projects that have a consequence.’ Every part of a student’s learning experience is informed by their personal interests and by real-world contexts, particularly internships (Transcend Education, 2024).

“Big Picture focuses on developing 21st century skills like creativity, collaboration, communication, planning and goal-setting” (Next School, 2024).

“Today, there are over 75 Big Picture network schools in the United States and many more around the world; with schools in Australia, the Netherlands, Italy and Canada utilizing the Big Picture Learning design” (Big Picture Learning, 2024).

FEATURED GOOD MAHI

Kea Centre, Taumarunui High School

Where: Ruapehu, Aotearoa New Zealand

Description: The Kea Centre at Taumarunui High School hub dedicated to supporting students with disabilities. Central to its approach is “big picture learning,” which teaches essential skills for independent living, such as numeracy, literacy, and functional life skills like filling out forms and managing money. The Kea Centre creates a family-like environment where connection is prioritised, offering students a sense of belonging and the tools they need to thrive.

“We have core learning with the numeracy and the literacy... Numeracy is mostly money, maths, and functional teaching, things that they will need to know in the community, [like] we practise filling out forms.”

“Big picture learning is teaching all the things that someone would need to live an independent and full life and be able to care for themselves and be fulfilled.”

“If this unit and the high school here wasn’t here, they would just be in the mainstream [system]. They probably wouldn’t have the same support as what they get from the care advisory...to be honest, I don’t know where they would be if it wasn’t for the advisory here in the high school. I’m not too sure where the support would come from.”



Raising Teacher Awareness of Biases

Raising teachers' awareness of gender biases to improve teacher quality and ensure equitable participation of female students in mathematics and related fields (Watson et al., 2016).

National Literature Insights:

“...raising teachers' gender awareness must be emphasized as integral to improving teacher quality, and enhancing the equitable future participation of female students in mathematics and related fields” (Watson et al., 2016, p 98).

Safer Environments for LGBTQ+ Students

Tackling heteronormative cultures that frame non-heterosexual identities as 'abnormal' by creating safe, inclusive, and supportive environments, particularly within schools. Schools must focus on fostering environments that build on the strengths and assets of LGBTQ+ students, avoid pathologizing their identities, and provide the resources and care necessary to support their mental health and safety (Lucassen et al., 2011).

National Literature Insights:

“Supportive, safe and caring families are particularly important for the health and wellbeing of same/ both-sex attracted young people as these youth are at an elevated risk of physical and emotional harm (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 17).

“Health professionals need to create environments where adolescents can talk openly about sexual attractions and they should screen for symptoms of depression and self-harm in students reporting that they are attracted to the same or to both sexes” (Lucassen et al., 2011, p. 18, 19).

“There is a vital need to ensure primary care and mental health services have the capacity and capability to screen and provide appropriate responsive care for youth who are attracted to the same or both sexes” (Lucassen et al., 2011, p. 4).

“Fortunately, the issues faced by same/both-sex attracted young people can be addressed by improving social environments. However, these environmental changes must focus on addressing heteronormative culture (i.e. where anything other than being exclusively opposite-sex attracted is viewed as 'wrong' or 'abnormal') and should refrain from 'problematizing' (or pathologizing) same/both-sex attracted young people” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 7).

“...reducing these disparities must focus on creating safe and nurturing environments which build upon the young person's strengths and assets, and refrains from problematizing (or pathologizing) same/both-sex attracted young people” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 5)

“Supportive, safe and caring families are particularly important for the health and wellbeing of same/ both-sex attracted young people as these youth are at an elevated risk of physical and emotional harm” (Lucassen et al., 2014, p. 19).

A Relevant and Tailored Curriculum for Māori

Developing a culturally relevant, hands-on curriculum that nurtures Māori youth's strengths, reconnects them with their iwi, history, and cultural identity, and fosters meaningful engagement with learning. Research supports this, highlighting the value of embedding Māori principles—such as ako (reciprocal learning) and whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building)—into classroom practices to help Māori students thrive by affirming their cultural identities and creating inclusive spaces where they can 'be who they are' (Bishop, 2003; Glynn et al., 2010). However, achieving this requires more than theoretical understanding; it calls for teachers to actively engage in cross-cultural learning to bridge divides and support transformative education for Māori learners (Bishop, 2003; Henderson, 2013).

Community Insights:

“It's just a standard curriculum that is pumped out everywhere but I mean like, what's being promoted at the moment is bringing in a more iwi lens, if they were learning about their people, and about their history, that would involve maths, it would involve english, but it has to be relevant.”

“Our Māori children love to work with their hands and create.”

“How do we fix it? I don't know how we fix it. But I know for me, it is having this place, the whenua, for our family, when they're troubled or down and out to come and reconnect, not only with the land but with each other, with the wairua of the place and, you know, to their tupuna and learning their whakapapa.”

“It's about our people learning their identity, who they are, and that we are a good people.”

National Literature Insights:

“...the solutions to marginalisation do not lie in the culture that marginalises. Rather solutions to structural issues of power and control—initiation, benefits, representation, legitimisation and accountability (Bishop, 1996)—can be addressed in mainstream classrooms by reference to Māori experiences of colonisation, resistance and educational initiatives in ways that will eventually benefit all students” (Bishop, 2003, p. 222, 223).

“When Māori students are able to “be who they are” in the classroom, processes of whakawhanaungatanga naturally occur” (Glynn et al., 2010, p. 119, 120).

“...it appears that Indigenous Māori cultural pedagogical principles of ako and whakawhanaungatanga, which have ensured the safe and effective transmission of knowledge and expertise for generations, closely anticipate principles and themes identified as culturally relevant pedagogy by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2006, 2008) and a transformative education for culturally diverse learners by Hale et al. (2008)” (Glynn et al., 2010, p. 120).

“We must attempt to create learning relationships within classrooms wherein learners' culturally generated sense-making processes are used and developed in order that they may successfully participate in classroom interactions. Such relationships must promote the knowledges, learning styles and sense-making processes of the learners as 'acceptable' or 'legitimate’” (Bishop, 2003, p. 229).

“If we are to enhance Māori students' ownership and engagement in their science learning, then we need to make sure that their science knowledge and lived experiences as Māori, together with those of their whānau and communities, are acknowledged and affirmed in our classroom curriculum and pedagogy” (Glynn et al., 2010, p. 126).

“One of the most powerful ways to develop this is to immerse oneself in real-life experiences which allow heart-level engagement in cultural richness which creates connectedness and understanding at a deeper level than can ever be attained from books and readings (Ashton-Warner, 1964; Lang, 2013; Mitcalf, 2008). Relationships which are genuine and heartfelt offer a key to the crossing of all kinds of boundaries, cultural ones included (Rogers, 1969)” (Henderson, 2013, p. 13).

“Recognising that knowledge alone is not enough to create change, we know that if the heart is authentically engaged, and a sense of social justice (and possibly class empathy also) exists within a teacher's cognisance, we are likely to achieve a shift in teacher positioning” (Henderson, 2013, p. 13).”

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Te Kotahitanga

Location: Aotearoa, New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2001 - Ongoing

Description: Te Kotahitanga is a research-based professional development programme designed to enhance the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary schools. The programme focuses on supporting teachers to develop culturally responsive pedagogies that foster meaningful teaching and learning relationships with Māori learners. By prioritising the understanding and valuing of Māori students’ cultural identities, Te Kotahitanga creates classroom environments where Māori students can thrive academically and personally. The intervention has undergone multiple phases and demonstrated significant impacts, including improving NCEA achievement rates for Māori students at three times the rate of comparison schools and significantly increasing Year 13 enrolment and achievement (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2014).

“The purpose of Te Kotahitanga was to improve classroom and school practices in order to build culturally responsive contexts for learning and effective teaching and learning relationships for and with Māori learners” (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).
“It was a research and professional development programme that supported teachers to improve Māori students’ learning and achievement, enabling teachers to create a culturally responsive context for learning which is responsive to evidence of student performance and understandings” (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia

Location: Aotearoa New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2008 (first iteration, ongoing revisions)

Description: Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia is New Zealand’s Māori Education Strategy, designed to transform the education system to deliver excellent and equitable outcomes for Māori learners from early learning through to tertiary education. It prioritises incorporating Māori identity, language, and culture into the education environment while fostering meaningful engagement with whānau, Hapū, and Iwi. The strategy outlines how education services can work collaboratively to support Māori enjoying and achieving education success as Māori (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2024).

“‘Ka hikitia’ means to step up, to lift up or to lengthen one’s stride. it means stepping up how the education system performs to ensure māori students are enjoying and achieving education success as māori” (Ministry of Education, 2013).
“Ka Hikitia is a cross-agency strategy for the education sector... It sets out how we will work with education services to achieve system shifts in education and support Māori learners and their whānau, hapū and iwi to achieve excellent and equitable outcomes” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
“We will support the identity, language and culture of Māori learners and their whānau to strengthen belonging, engagement and achievement as Māori so that Māori learners can actively participate in te ao Māori, Aotearoa and the wider world” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
“We will recognise and build on the strengths of Māori learners and their whānau” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
“The education system has underperformed for Māori learners and their whānau over an extended period. As a result, Māori learners collectively experience worse education outcomes than other New Zealand learners and are less engaged in our education system” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Schools Better Connecting with Students and Families

Strengthen connections between teachers, students, and whānau by fostering caring relationships, open communication, and greater whānau involvement in education so that students feel supported and motivated in their learning journey. Research supports this, emphasising that collaboration, mutual trust, and culturally inclusive communication between schools and families are essential for improving student learning outcomes and wellbeing (Mutch & Collins, 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Community Insights:

“And I think that, I challenge the people who are in big, big schools, you can do it. There’s ways of doing it, and it’s connecting with your kids, loving your kids, you know.”
“I think in the secondary space, we’ve got to involve our families more... I’ve often seen since then, at schools, they only go to the gate and say, ‘see ya’, if they do go to the gate.”
“Yeah, we got to get them in. We got to entice these people in, because they, especially in the secondary education, they’re at a vital time, and they’ve got to be on the they’ve got to be on the decision board as to what is best for my kid. It’s going to not just leave it to the teacher, have a voice and be there.”
“You’ve got to involve them, because it’s such an important part of the learning that a lot of them will do, it is so important to involve whanau.”
“I do think children’s achievement levels are influenced by parental expectations and parental involvement. If you have parents that aren’t involved in their children’s achievements, it may not be a conscious thought, but they’ll be thinking, ‘Well, who cares? Mum and dad don’t, so why should I?’”
“But the thing it taught me is how to connect with people as well, and the importance of it, the teacher’s job is to connect, and if you can connect in a positive way, the kids have got a chance at learning and achieving.”
“Tūhonohono is the word that I’m barking around here. If you can make the connection with the kids, the kids can understand that you are a teacher that cares for them. The more you know about them, what they need, and what they want from them and the family, you’re onto a winner.”

National Literature Insights:
“Engagement between schools and parents, whānau, and communities is strongly influenced by the extent to which school personnel and parents believe in and value partnerships that share responsibility for children’s learning and wellbeing. Developing common understanding and expectations of the benefits of engagement and the challenges involved is integral to successful partnerships” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 177).
“Leadership is crucial in creating meaningful and respectful partnerships. Engagement between schools and their communities works well when there is a vision and commitment from school leaders to working in partnership with all parents” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 178).
“Engagement worked well when schools had a commitment to working collaboratively with parents, whānau, and communities. Collaborative practices underpinned the development of mutually respectful relationships. Partnerships were developed and extended in a climate of openness and trust and supported by appropriate communication strategies” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 177).
“Good communication strategies and practices play an important part in developing and maintaining relationships. Effective communication needs to be personalized and regular. Parents want honest and easy-to-understand information, soon rather than later, that involves them in decision making, is culturally inclusive, and opens up opportunities for them to support their child’s learning and development” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 181, 182).
“Mutual trust and respect are critical to relationships in which staff and parents share responsibility for children’s learning and well-being” (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 183).
“Caring relationships between parents, schools, and the community have been found to be important factors influencing happiness among adolescents” (Johns, 2017, p. 63).

Preventing Bullying

Creating safer and more inclusive school environments while reducing absenteeism through whole-school approaches to bullying and behaviour management. This includes implementing comprehensive anti-bullying strategies, consistent expert support, evidence-based programmes, clearer accountability, community support, and empowering students to ‘stand tall together’ by voicing their disapproval and intervening against bullying (Adams et al., 2012; Education Review Office, 2023; Denny et al., 2014; Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023).

National Literature Insights:

- “Overall, these findings support whole-school approaches that aid students to take action to stop bullying” (Denny et al., 2014, p. 4).
- “Based on these findings, we suggest that students need to be encouraged to stand tall together, to voice their disapproval and to intervene” (Adams et al., 2012, p. 22).
- “Evidence suggests promoting positive relationships between teachers and learners and promoting connectedness and belonging are two key ways to improve attendance. This can go alongside implementing an anti-bullying plan and ensuring cultural safety.” (Education Review Office, 2023, p. 9)
- “...schools need to examine their processes for keeping students safe and dealing with issues such as bullying effectively to address the level of absenteeism.” (Richards & Clark-Howard, 2023, p. 74)

Media Insights:

- “The report recommended prioritising classroom behaviour and supporting all schools to prevent, notice and respond to challenging behaviours” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
- “...schools needed more accountability and clearer expectations, greater efforts to prevent bad behaviour, more support and training for teachers, and effective consequences for badly-behaved children” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
- “...there needs to be a look at what community support is available for students behaving at that level, as they often have a raft of issues that may stem from mental health concerns, poverty or neglect (New Zealand Herald, 2023).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

KiVa Anti-bullying Programme

Location: Finland (originally); implemented in over 18 countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2007

Description: KiVa is a research-based anti-bullying programme funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The programme takes a whole-school approach, targeting students from primary to early secondary school years, with a focus on preventing bullying, intervening in incidents, and monitoring outcomes to continuously refine the programme’s implementation. KiVa provides schools with a range of tools to foster safe and inclusive learning environments. Since its launch, KiVa has been adopted by schools in over 18 countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand, to reduce bullying and promote student wellbeing. Its effectiveness has also been demonstrated through extensive scientific studies (KiVa Program, 2024).

- “KiVa is a research- and evidence-based antibullying program that has been developed in the University of Turku, Finland, with funding from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture” (KiVa Program, 2024).
- “The program is evidence-based which means that the effectiveness of KiVa has been proven scientifically” (KiVa Program, 2024).
- “KiVa offers a wide range of concrete tools and materials for schools to tackle bullying” (KiVa Program, 2024).
- “KiVa is being used around the world and it is the world’s most studied anti-bullying program” (KiVa Program, 2024).
- “The goal of KiVa is to prevent bullying and to tackle the cases of bullying effectively. The program is based on decades of extensive research of bullying and its mechanisms. KiVa is based on three main elements: prevention, intervention and monitoring” (KiVa Program, 2024).

Better Preparing Students for Work

Empowering schools, parents, and communities to equip youth with essential work-ready skills such as communication, CV writing, interviewing, and adaptability, to better prepare them to meet employer needs and transition smoothly into the workforce.

Community Insights:

- “How to give people a base skill when they leave school, this will take a lot of problems off the future employer.”
- “How to talk to people, how to talk to colleagues, she [a young 19 year old staff member] approaches it very much as ‘you’re a teenage mate and I can talk to you like that’ but it’s not really appropriate.”
- “Coming in what was identified is there is a huge component missing with regards to CVs, interview skills, job seeking etc in order to be able to compete with adults that have experience.”
- “They should bring in some of the work ready skills, CV writing etc, that can be brought into the English sphere.”
- “Kids think that they can’t do things, and yet, they just need that confidence and that push a little bit, it would be really cool.”
- “Kids just need to believe in themselves. If our young families could just believe that they can do it, that would be just a big step forward. We can do it. We can help you.”
- “It’s just knowing that you can take that leap of faith, you can do it on your own, and you can be confident in yourself to do it.”
- “Learning these so-called ‘soft skills’ is actually a priority, it’s no less than hard skills. Unless children learn how to adapt, learn how to problem solve, develop a way to be resilient, they will suffer. That will take away options as much as not having a particular qualification.”
- “They’ll always need support in CV’s, they’ll always need support with interviews, they’ll always need support with building their confidence and self belief.”

Media Insights:

- “Even if it’s just a couple of lessons on just the basics of how to write a CV, what to expect, how to read a contract, what certain things mean and just learning about the fundamentals that you need when you’re going into the workforce” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
- “Some business leaders want schools to make students more work-ready. Schools reply that they have programmes in place to help students develop the skills if they want to, but stress they are not “work readiness organisations” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
- “We can give them the knowledge and the skills, but we can’t give them the attitude and the habits. That’s what they need to come with” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
- “...priority areas were making sure young people were reliable, got to work on time, were confident in communicating, could have difficult conversations when needed and took initiative” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
- “We need to make sure all our young people can leave school with the skills they need to get on in life and avoid common pitfalls that can easily trip them up” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
- “It’s a great school but not everyone’s wanting to go to university. And even if you were to go to university, you still need those fundamental skills on how to apply for jobs” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).
- “Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand president Vaughan Couillault disagrees with employer claims that schools need to do more to make students ready for their first job (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Studio Schools

Location: United Kingdom
Year Implemented: 2010 - Ongoing

Description: Studio Schools are new educational concepts designed for 14- to 19-year-olds of all abilities. They combine academic and vocational qualifications through practical, project-based learning to ensure education is rooted in real-world experiences. Studio Schools aim to equip students with essential employability and life skills, to open pathways to university, training, or employment (UK Government, 2024, Space Studio West London, 2024).

- “Studio schools are small schools (usually with around 300 pupils) teaching mainstream qualifications through project-based learning. This means working in realistic situations as well as learning academic subjects” (UK Government, 2024).
- “The Studio School is a new concept in education, which seeks to address the growing gap between the skills and knowledge that young people require to succeed, and those that the current education system provides” (Space Studio West London, 2024).
- “Studio Schools pioneer a bold new approach to learning, which includes teaching through enterprise projects and real work. This approach ensures that students’ learning is rooted in the real world and helps them to develop the skills they need to succeed in life” (Space Studio West London, 2024).
- “Studio Schools are designed for 14-19 year olds of all abilities. They are small schools for 300 students, and are open for a ‘working day’ between 8:30am and 5:00pm, feeling more like a workplace than a school” (Space Studio West London, 2024).
- “Working closely with local employers, Studio Schools offer a range of academic and vocational qualifications including GCSE’s in English, Maths and Science, as well as work placements linked directly to employment opportunities in the local area” (Space Studio West London, 2024).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

STAR (Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource)

Location: Aotearoa, New Zealand
Year Implemented: 1996

Description: The Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) is a funding initiative by the New Zealand Ministry of Education designed to support Year 11 to 13 students in their transition from secondary education to further study or employment. By providing additional resources, STAR enables schools to offer a range of tailored learning experiences, including taster courses and work-based opportunities, allowing students to explore pathways that align with their own educational and career goals (Ministry of Education, 2024).

- “STAR gives schools the ability to provide the range of learning experiences their students need to successfully transition to further study and employment” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
- “Schools may use STAR funding to: provide flexible courses, including work-based learning where possible; [and] give students opportunities to explore pathways to work or further education” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
- “Schools may use STAR funding to: provide flexible courses, including work-based learning where possible; give students opportunities to explore pathways to work or further education” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
- “We provide STAR funding to all state and state-integrated schools and kura with ākonga | students in Year 11 and above” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

FEATURED GOOD MAHI

100% Sweet

Where: Whanganui, New Zealand

Description: 100% SWEET is a programme dedicated to helping young people transition successfully into employment, education, or training by building work-ready skills, supporting secondary schools with vocational pathway planning and connecting students to potential employers through work experience opportunities.

- “100% Sweet was born from industry getting together and saying “we need young people that are work-ready into employment, but we’re having difficulty recruiting them”.
- “They’ll always need support in CVs, they’ll always need support with interviews, they’ll always need support with building their confidence and self-belief.”
- “Some kids transition quite easily and some need a little bit more hand-holding and support, we’re able to provide that by supporting them and catching them before they fall.”
- “We want all our young people to have the ability to thrive, and to move into employment, sustainable employment, not just a casual job.”

“We cover big achievements, teamwork, communication, mock interviews, and CVs. All those life skills that will help them transition easier into the world of work.”



Better Preparing Students for Life

Better equipping students with essential life skills, such as financial literacy, personal legal preparedness, and practical abilities like cooking and gardening, by integrating these foundational lessons into modern curricula.

Community Insights:

- “Home economics needs to come back, budgeting needs to come back, understanding simple things like you need a will by the time you’re 18 and that you need an EPOA (Enduring Power of Attorney) in place.”
- “There are so many things that I think, personally, they need to be taught. Like growing a garden, cooking, how to manage money, just your basic things. Give them a little background in that.”

Aligning Future Pathways to Workforce Needs

Strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and employers to align academic programmes with workforce needs, ensuring students are better prepared to meet job market demands. Research supports this, highlighting the need for stronger connections between education and the labour market to guide students toward and upskill them in career pathways aligned with workforce demands (Bibbee, 2013).

Community Insights:

“I do think sometimes with education, the schools aren’t thinking about the needs that are out there, I don’t know if the dots are being joined around what’s the need in the community and with tertiary education, are we putting people in the best place possible to fulfil the needs out there of employers?”

National Literature Insights:

“...ensuring greater coherence between educational and labour-market institutions to address the structural skills shortage and associated low-productivity problem” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 22).
“Establishing stronger linkages between education and work would help to assure that the acquired skills of graduates better fit the needs of business” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 5).
“To bridge this gap, students must be helped and even trained to choose the fields and levels of qualification that are not only compatible with their interests and abilities but also likely to be needed in the labour market by the time they graduate” (Bibbee, 2013, p. 35).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Youth Guarantee

Location: Aotearoa, New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2010

Description: The Youth Guarantee initiative, launched in 2010 by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, helps young people aged 16 to 19 in achieving National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualifications through alternative pathways. It provides Vocational Pathways, fees-free tertiary courses, as well as Trades Academies and Services Academies that aim to equip students with industry-aligned and work-readiness skills that will support their transition into further education, training, or employment (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“Youth Guarantee initiatives aim to support learners in developing their own pathways towards future work and careers, and help educators meet the needs of their students (Ministry of Education, 2024).”
“Vocational Pathways map level 1-3 assessment standards to six industry sectors to show how NCEA learning and achievement is valued by employers” (Ministry of Education, 2024).
“Youth Guarantee fees free tertiary programmes provide 16-24-year-olds who have left school with opportunities to study towards NCEA or equivalent qualifications at tertiary providers free-of-charge” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

FEATURED GOOD MAHI

Whanganui City College

Where: Whanganui, Aotearoa New Zealand

Description: Whanganui City College launched a unique house-building programme for its senior students, the first of its kind in Whanganui. It is the result of a collaborative partnership between Whanganui City College, AGC Training, and Brittons Housemovers and is aimed at engaging Year 12 and 13 students in construction while earning NCEA Level 2 and 3 credits (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

“There are obviously children or young adults going to school who don’t want to be stuck in a classroom all day. They want to get into the trades, and this is a gateway for them to get into the trades. Whether they come here and do the building course, and then go off and be a plumber or an electrician, you know, the trades are screaming out for people.”
“I don’t want my kids leaving school and going to nothing, man. If they’re leaving school because they just want to leave school, that’s not good enough for me.”

“You’ve got to set up what you do at the school in line with the direction that these kids are going to go in.”



FEATURED GOOD MAHI

Te Awanui a Rua Charitable Trust

Where: Ruapehu, Aotearoa New Zealand

Description: Te Awanui a Rua Charitable Trust is committed to unlocking the potential of the Taumarunui community by delivering educational opportunities that foster employment and promote the sustainability of natural resources. Through collaboration with tertiary education providers, they offer New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) accredited courses at their Marae and in surrounding regions, carefully tailored to meet the unique needs of their whānau and community (Te Awanui a Rua Charitable Trust, 2024).

“We’ve got about 45 boarding kids in boarding schools throughout New Zealand. We get them out of our community because our high school is not up to the level of standard.”
“I’ve got a counsellor on board with us because there is no counselling service in Taumarunui so we grabbed it...I have [also] got Māra Kai Institute with me, so they are sending counselling down to us, because my students need counselling, they need support.”

“So we have got 10 students we put into University this year, and they’re all doing law, Māori, marketing and technology, music and teaching.”



Better Parental Support

Empowering parents to actively engage in their children’s education, enabling them to take an active role in their child’s education rather than relying solely on schools to provide all the necessary tools and support for their development.

Community Insights:
“The expectation that school is going to give our youth everything they need, that’s handing over what actually we can do in the home. How do we encourage our parents that actually they’ve got a role and how to do that alongside their children?”

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Pasifika PowerUP

Location: Aotearoa, New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2013

Description: Pasifika PowerUP is an educational programme developed by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to enhance the academic success of Pasifika students. Using a family-centered approach, it offers workshops that equip Pasifika parents, families, and communities with the tools and knowledge needed to support their children’s education effectively. The programme provides targeted support for both parents and students, focusing on understanding the New Zealand education system, navigating NCEA processes, selecting subjects, and building study skills. By boosting confidence, and achievement, Pasifika PowerUP hopes to address the educational disparities faced by Pacific learners (Education Gazette, 2024).

“The Pasifika PowerUP Plus programme is helping Pacific parents and adult family members navigate the education system and better support their children’s academic achievements.”
“PowerUP sessions currently run for 26 weeks, and deliver targeted education workshops to Pacific parents and their families” (Education Gazette, 2024).
“Students can access academic support and mentoring, and attend workshops about topics like study skills, subject choice, health and wellbeing, how to deal with bullying, and financial literacy” (Education Gazette, 2024).
“The PowerUP model works for the whole family because it is based on Pacific culture and includes grandparents, siblings and aunts and uncles” (Education Gazette, 2024).
“...the whole-of-family approach provides parents with a greater understanding of the education system and how to best support their children, and gives students more confidence and improves their engagement in their learning” (Education Gazette, 2024).

Working Whilst at School

Empowering youth to engage in meaningful work and educational pathways from an earlier age, fostering a sense of independence, purpose, and pride.

Community Insights:
“It starts with youth being able to work from a younger age. There is a golden opportunity to get them into that mindset and build that pride of earning money.”
“Kids are bored. They need to get into work so that they are contributing. That will set them up for their future to be more engaging and contributing to their family, so that they feel like they can pay their own way.”

Gateway Work Placement Programmes

Providing practical gateway programmes and alternative pathways for students to explore trades and hands-on careers, acknowledging that traditional academic routes like NCEA may not suit everyone and promoting the value of essential skilled work.

Community Insights:
“Encouraging that it’s okay to do apprenticeships. When COVID-19 came along, it wasn’t us ‘intelligent people’ going to work, it was the essential workers, they call them essential workers for a reason.”
“We need to celebrate that it’s okay to have hands [on work] as such.”
“[Gateway programmes] is a great way for kids to work out trades, whether they like them or not.”
“I think kids are more likely to go to the gateway than to do their NCEA, to be fair.”
“Speaking from a UK perspective - It’s very common to leave school at 16 to go either into an apprenticeship or you go to another institution for two years of further education which is more specific to what you want to do. I just wonder how that would impact New Zealand.”
“Simply the recognition that NCEA isn’t the pathway – for them. They can stay engaged at school, but through other forms of education, whether it be work placements or polytech studies, that might actually challenge them more than NCEA standard stuff.”

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Gateway Funding

Location: Aotearoa New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2001 - ongoing

Description: Gateway Funding is a New Zealand initiative that helps schools support senior secondary school students (Years 11 to 13) in transitioning to the workforce by integrating workplace learning with their school education. Through structured workplace experiences, students develop vocational skills and gain real-world experiences, all while earning credits toward their National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). This programme broadens students’ educational opportunities while strengthening their pathways to further education, training, or direct employment (Tertiary Education Commission, 2024).

“Youth Guarantee initiatives aim to support learners in developing their own pathways towards future work and careers, and help educators meet the needs of their students” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2024).
“Vocational Pathways map level 1-3 assessment standards to six industry sectors to show how NCEA learning and achievement is valued by employers” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2024).
“Youth Guarantee fees free tertiary programmes provide 16-24-year-olds who have left school with opportunities to study towards NCEA or equivalent qualifications at tertiary providers free-of-charge” (Tertiary Education Commission, 2024).

Better Support for Struggling Students

Creating a collaborative network of services that ensures accessible, supportive, and engaging environments for youth by offering trauma-informed support, family involvement, and improved service visibility to foster resilience and better wellbeing.

Community Insights:

“I work for Youth Services Trust, who work with young people. We’ve been here for 25 years and still find people who don’t know about us. We go to all sorts of concerts to sell ourselves and all schools know about us but still.”

“It’s hard to engage a young one or a learner when they’re just not functioning, you know, you need the skills around to support them.”

“I think too if you’ve got the family engaged, you get a better result because they want the best for them as well.”

“They just don’t know sometimes how to get out, so once you get them going and then start ironing out some of those problems, piece of cake.”

“The more small things, and networks, that we get in play, hopefully, the more impact it’ll have.”

FEATURED INTERVENTION

PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning)

Location: Aotearoa, New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2009

Description: Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) is a nationwide initiative in Aotearoa New Zealand aimed at supporting parents, whānau, teachers, early childhood centres, schools, and kura to address student behaviour, enhancing wellbeing, and increasing educational achievement. PB4L takes a tiered approach to support all learners, with universal (school-wide), targeted (group-based), and individualised interventions. The programme also incorporates restorative practices and culturally responsive approaches such as Huakina Mai, which embed kaupapa Māori principles. By strengthening relationships and fostering engagement, PB4L aims to remove barriers to student success (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).

“Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) initiatives help parents, whānau, teachers, early childhood centres, schools and kura address behaviour, improve children’s well-being, and increase educational achievement” (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).

“PB4L is a systematic approach involving a suite of initiatives. These include universal whole-school change initiatives, targeted group programmes, and individual student support services” (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).

“Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) improves the behaviour and wellbeing of children and young people” (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).

“PB4L is for children and adults in all areas of education. Its frameworks and programmes are for individuals, groups, all learning environments, teachers, parents and whānau, and school communities. The PB4L suite offers tools for supporting positive behaviours for learning, in all environments” (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2024).

Intervening Early

Implementing early interventions and tailored support for at-risk youth, beginning in kindergarten and primary school, to address underlying issues and prevent long-term educational and social challenges.

Community Insights:

“Need to find out why they are bored and why they are not achieving standards at school. And before it’s too late. It’s easy for people to say ‘pass, fail, pass, fail’.”

“They need to be picked up when they are in kindergarten. These kids show signs in kindergarten. So, [in the] first year [of] primary, they need to be picked up. Something needs to be done.”

“It’s getting all the new early childhood kids who are going to x school to meet the new entrance teacher and the new entrance teacher and the kindy teacher working together to see ‘what’s this kid like?’.”

“I’ll just say it in one phrase, the village is raising the child, so if they get a good start, the journey is going to be good. The first 1000 days in a kid’s life are the most important days.”

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Kāhui Ako

Location: Aotearoa New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2014

Description: Kāhui Ako, or Communities of Learning, are collaborative groups of education and training providers in Aotearoa New Zealand that work together to help students achieve their full potential. Each Kāhui Ako includes a wide range of education providers, from early learning services to secondary schools and post-secondary institutions, which work collectively to create a cohesive learning pathway for students through shared goals. By fostering collaboration and sharing expertise, Kāhui Ako aims to improve teaching practices, support smooth transitions between the different stages of education, as well as improve student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“Kāhui Ako, or Communities of Learning, bring together education and training providers with the aim of helping students to achieve their full potential” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“Each Kāhui Ako sets shared goals, or achievement challenges, based on the needs of its children and young people. The Kāhui Ako works with students, their parents, whānau, iwi and communities to achieve those goals across the learner pathway” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“The Kāhui Ako works with students, their parents, whānau, iwi and communities to achieve those goals across the learner pathway” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“Kāhui Ako include early learning services, schools, kura, and post-secondary education providers” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“There are 220 established Kāhui Ako around New Zealand” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Strengthening School Counselling Services

Improving access to mental health support in schools through equitable and free counselling services, particularly for Māori and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Johns, 2017), alongside equipping staff with mental health literacy, in order to provide essential support for youth during critical developmental stages, enhance overall student wellbeing, and help prevent educational underachievement (New Zealand Herald, 2023; Radio New Zealand, 2023).

National Literature Insights:

“Research has found that offering free counselling can be used as an effective method for reducing mental health symptoms and concerns for both Māori and lower socioeconomic adolescents” (Johns, 2017, p. 61).

Media Insights:

“The Association of Counsellors warns school counselling services are badly over-stretched and need more funding from the next government” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
“...secondary students needed skilled professionals because they were at a vulnerable stage developing their identity with increased risk-taking behaviour (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
“We’re looking to have a ratio of one counsellor to every 400. At the moment it’s very inequitable across the country. Sometimes there’s a counsellor for every 1400 students and one to 2000 which is actually a risk” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
“Teachers have reported student health and wellbeing are an ongoing concern... But they also say they are under-resourced, under-trained and stretched by the wide array of demands on them. These range from managing challenging student behaviours, to identifying and supporting students with physical and mental health needs” (New Zealand Herald, 2023).
“...increasing calls for improved mental health literacy among school staff... They also expressed their need to be better prepared to recognise mental health issues and provide classroom support” (New Zealand Herald, 2023).

“Providing teachers with skills to better support their students’ health needs can be an effective way to improve policy outcomes (New Zealand Herald, 2023).
“A greater investment in school health services can address barriers to student learning and bring together otherwise-separate sectors. It is also an opportunity to review the role health professionals can play in assisting teachers to identify, understand and support the health needs of students (New Zealand Herald, 2023).

Support for Expelled Students

Providing community-driven support programmes, repurposing vacant spaces, and strengthening support services to re-engage youth expelled from school, preventing long-term unemployment and reducing antisocial behaviours.

Community Insights:

“I’m actually going for some money to be able to kind of support young people that potentially have fallen out of school and not yet claiming benefits and at the risk of long term unemployment.”
“It’s trying to, [whether] through the council or the community, find ways to try to help our kids become engaged again, [so] they don’t think about smashing a window, or stealing a car.”
“We do the annual residence survey. We asked residents for their opinions on various things, and then the verbatim comments every year, it’s the same; we need more for young people to do. We just get that comment frequently, year after year.”
“Even if it was a youth club, and there was someone manning it, they didn’t have to be with the youth but just somewhere that was watched over so that there was no gang stuff going on, or dodgy dealings or anything like that.”
“I think, yep, youth do need their own spaces, but they also have to want their own spaces and they have to be able to use them too. If the space is there, you’ve got to utilise it.”
“There needs to be something here to occupy them. We have the skatepark, but we have a lot of empty buildings here that could be a bowling alley or a pool. I don’t know, something to get them off the streets causing mischief.”
“If you can support the young ones who have become dis-engaged, and link them back into a thriving community, this equals fantastic outcomes further down the track.”

Truancy and Attendance

Creating proactive, community-focused truancy support that addresses the root causes of absenteeism through wrap-around services, ensuring students are supported to attend school regularly and achieve better educational outcomes (1News, 2024; New Zealand Herald, 2024; Radio New Zealand, 2023).

Community Insights:

“The truancy service needs to be much more proactive, it’s deep rooted social issues that need to be wrapped with the right support.”
“Truancy services are very slow too.”

Media Insights:

“We need a change of direction to restore the habit of attending school regularly” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
“Almost every aspect of someone’s adult life will be defined by the education they receive as a child. For better social outcomes, kids need to be in the classroom and learning the basics” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
“As a nation, we can’t accept a level of mediocrity where less than half of students are regularly attending school. To succeed in education, you have to show up” (Radio New Zealand, 2023).
“When dealing with non-attendance we need to understand the reasons and issues that lead to it and then work through solutions to improve attendance (1News, 2024).
“Community involvement is a common theme among the three principals we talked to for today’s episode, along with the need for more resources to tackle attendance and truancy problems, rather than ‘gimmicks’ like traffic lights” (New Zealand Herald, 2024).

FEATURED GOOD MAHI

Central King Country R.E.A.P.

Where: Rangitikei, Ruapehu

Description: Central King Country (CKC) R.E.A.P. was established to empower the Taumarunui and King Country community through education and practical services. Dedicated to upskilling residents and supporting youth, the organisation offers a range of initiatives, including the School Attendance Service, where committed staff work alongside students and families to address attendance challenges. CKC R.E.A.P. is also a proud member of Kāhui Ako—a collaborative network of educators and training providers focused on creating cohesive learning pathways to help young people reach their full potential (Central King Country REAP, 2024).

“Central King Country R.E.A.P. is part of R.E.A.P. Aotearoa, so we are one of thirteen R.E.A.P.s across the rohe who provide education services to the community.”
“Regular attendance is needed for children to continue learning and improving their basic reading, writing and other skills they need... REAP has staff members who work to help students and families where attendance is a concern (REF).”

“We provide a space where you can come to kōrero, it’s a safe space, and we are there to listen and provide those things you need. If you need someone to listen, we are there.”



Technology Awareness and Education

Improving digital literacy and promoting healthy technology use by gathering data on students’ screen time, encouraging a balance between online and offline activities, and equipping students with the skills to use digital tools responsibly (1News, 2024).

Community Insights:

- “We need to look at how much time students spend on a screen in a school day. We don’t actually collate that data and what the overall impact of that is.”
- “Maybe we need to pay more attention to making sure everybody can readily access the internet for good uses.”
- “You’ve got to see whether education is not directing them properly in terms of technology and how to use it. Or parents are just using screens as, you know, a way to entertain. I know some people believe that.”
- “Our schooling system, what we need to be able to provide the levels of care, education, digital learning eLearning is massive.”
- “COVID-19 taught us that we can do things in a way that we’ve never done before. I think we need to focus on that.”
- “School education and systems and the schools need to start educating kids about the purpose vs. dangers of these devices.”

Media Insights:

- “Technology certainly can provide opportunities for learning, and kids will need great digital skills” (1News, 2024).
- “She said more families were asking for support, and eye doctors started discussing the need for clearer guidance” (1News, 2024).
- “Cullen said there had been a lot of guidance around the recreational use of technology but nothing when it came to the classroom (1News, 2024).
- “...technology was a great learning tool but said there needed to be “balanced use”. It wasn’t an “either-or equation”” (1News, 2024).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Manaiakalani Programme

Location: Auckland, New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2007

Description: The Manaiakalani Programme is a collaborative initiative designed to improve outcomes for students in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities by using digital tools and effective teaching practices. The programme aims to empower learners and their whānau (families) with ‘digital citizenship’, helping them actively engage in education and achieve their full potential. Over the years, Manaiakalani has become widely recognised in New Zealand as a successful model for improving student achievement and participation in communities facing socioeconomic challenges (Manaiakalani Education Trust, 2024).

- “Manaiakalani, the hook from heaven, has become known throughout New Zealand for supporting schools in low socioeconomic and challenged communities to achieve significant improvements in student outcomes, realising learners’ potential and enabling digital citizenship for tauira and their whānau” (Manaiakalani Education Trust, 2024).
- “...this group has grappled with making school engaging, empowering and successful for our population of largely Māori and Pasifika learners. We have a constant focus on equity and access to give our young people excellent opportunities to be fully empowered citizens (Manaiakalani Education Trust, 2024).
- “In 2007, a community of learners, whānau and educators in the Auckland suburbs of Glen Innes, Pt England and Panmure (collectively known as Tāmaki) embarked on a project to raise student outcomes and build capacity and engagement through the combination of media and digital technologies and effective teaching practice” (Manaiakalani Education Trust, 2024).
- “By offering students full digital citizenship, the Manaiakalani Programme helps them realise their potential” (Manaiakalani Education Trust, 2024).

Face-to-face Learning

Enhancing student engagement and understanding by prioritising face-to-face interactions, allowing teachers to monitor progress, provide immediate feedback, and deliver timely assistance (Flack et al., 2020).

National Literature Insights:

- “Multiple educators’ responses pointed out that face-to-face interactions were essential to monitoring student understanding, providing immediate assistance or feedback, and keeping students engaged” (Flack et al., 2020, p. 20).

Drug Awareness and Education

Empowering youth to lead workshops focused on educating peers about identifying drugs, understanding drug use, and recognising associated risks.

Community Insights:

- “In the Taumarunui, and in the Ruapehu region, I had some rangatahi come to me, and they were wanting to set up a programme or workshop to try and find ways to facilitate more in high schools around P and that, and tell them what to do with it and how to identify those sort of drugs, especially when you are going clubbing, and you’re going out to concerts and all that.”

Food Management and Education

Enhancing food management in schools and larger external commercial food contractors by actively involving students in the entire food process, from garden to plate, while also aligning meal planning with daily attendance and specific needs to minimise waste and encourage sustainable practices within school environments (1News, 2024).

Community Insights:

- “[There is] lots of concern about wastage. On one hand, we get it, and it’s a useful thing, but the way it’s done could be managed better and they’re not taking into account roles, not asking who’s at school today so they are throwing out so much food.”
- “Get them involved from the garden, to the plate, to the home.”

Media Insights:

- “I think the free lunches are awesome but we need better regulations with the contractors. They sent us photos and samples in the beginning and it is nowhere near the same quality of what they actually supply” (1News, 2024).
- “At the end of the day, if my waste is high I’m not doing my job because that’s food that needs to be in their bellies” (1News, 2024).
- “It was easier for smaller external contractors to make adjustments to reduce waste, they said, recognising larger commercial contractors had more difficulty” (1News, 2024).
- “Yes, let’s not waste more food because there’s enough waste in this country already. But the other side is, I can see this programme works for so many kids. It’s so important and no one wants it cut” (1News, 2024).
- “If they were making food that kids actually love to eat, while covering all the nutritional bases, then kids would absolutely eat it. It would absolutely reduce waste” (1News, 2024).

FEATURED INTERVENTION

Ka ora Ka Ako

Location: Aotearoa New Zealand
Year Implemented: 2020

Description: SKa Ora, Ka Ako is a New Zealand government initiative launched in 2020 to address food insecurity among students in schools facing significant socioeconomic challenges. The programme provides free, nutritious lunches every school day to approximately 235,000 students with the aim to support child development, health, and wellbeing, while removing barriers to participating and achieving in education. Ensuring that students have access to healthy meals, Ka Ora, Ka Ako supports students' concentration, behaviour, and overall engagement in their studies. The programme operates in about 40% of New Zealand's primary, intermediate, and secondary schools, with lunches prepared by approved suppliers, schools themselves, or in partnership with local Iwi and Hapū (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“We provide nutritious lunches, every school day, to about 235,000 students who are in need of the greatest support. We support child development, health, wellbeing and remove barriers to participation and achievement in education” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“We provide a free healthy lunch to students in about 40% of New Zealand primary, intermediate and secondary schools and kura” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“Ka Ora, Ka Ako aims to reduce food insecurity by providing a daily nutritious lunch to ākonga (students) at schools and kura in need of the greatest support” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

“Ka Ora, Ka Ako provides more than a million free healthy lunches every week to ākonga | students in schools and kura around Aotearoa” (Ministry of Education, 2024).

We now direct our attention to a singular opportunity, known as the ‘Highlighted Opportunity for Action,’ which strongly resonated with the Impact Collective team. In this opportunity, we will explore its potential impact on secondary education before posing a thought-provoking question to inspire reflection on how we can collectively turn these insights into actionable steps.

Building Career Readiness for All Students

There is a significant opportunity to enhance career readiness by creating a robust, student-centered development system that offers comprehensive and accessible pathways tailored to students’ strengths and interests. This system should begin in early education and continue through high school and beyond. It involves equipping educators and schools with the resources needed to provide consistent, individualised guidance while connecting students with role models, resources, and real-world career insights through workplace engagement and expos.

By fostering these conversations and exposing students to diverse opportunities, we can ensure every child leaves school empowered to make informed choices and equipped to take meaningful next steps, paving the way for successful, fulfilling futures.

Community Insights

- “It’s about creating options, and showing children their options, so they aren’t leaving school shortchanged.”
- “How do you get it across to students that this is setting you up for a career path and that what you miss out on in high school, you might not be able to pick up elsewhere.”
- “Work, training, tertiary education expo’s; we haven’t been able to do that under COVID restrictions. There’s been a gap there for probably a couple of years now.”
- “Some potentially start at school, career guidance. You’ve probably got one career guidance person that’s got a school of 1000 people. How do you interact with other students and support them to have a career pathway?”
- “I think there needs to be much more designated, I probably wouldn’t call it careers because it sounds boring, but funding that is ring-fenced for future pathways.”
- “If we’re doing our job right as teachers here, and I’m a whānau teacher and I’m tracking my kid from year nine to year 13, hopefully, I’ll know what the destination is.”
- “Having those conversations, preparing them, building capacity, right back then asking them what they want to do when they grow up, those sorts of conversations, and then monitoring those all the way through to the high school level and into the adult level as well.”
- “The message should just be about, start somewhere, whether that’s education or employment that is okay and a meaningful next step, even if you’re not sure if that is your forever thing.”
- “They need to invite people into schools from various workplaces to come in and talk to the kids. Give the children a range of what’s out there and what might be interesting for them.”

National Literature Insights

- “Career education needs to be an integral part of a new education model for the 21st century, not a separate add-on activity (Hodgetts, 2009, p. 5).”
- “... an integrated whole-school approach is the way forward, as it has the potential to bring career education to the centre of teaching and learning (Hodgetts, 2009, p. 5).”
- “What does high quality careers education and guidance look like?... Carefully designing careers education and guidance activities and programmes to link to the school’s curriculum and pastoral care systems (Education Review Office, 2015, p. 2).”
- “Providing individualised guidance and support to help students at risk of poor outcomes to successfully transition into tertiary education, training and employment (Education Review Office, 2015, p. 2).”
- “... educators and employers should collaborate to help young people develop life skills, through career-integrated school programmes and by providing experiential learning in the workplace (Grove, 2018, p. 2).”
- “Quality career development programmes that are student-centred, culturally responsive, raise aspirations and connect the relevance of learning to work can help schools address the national challenge of entrenched disparity in achievement for some groups (Tertiary Education Commission, 2016, p. 6).”
- “The emphasis in career education must shift to developing the underlying competencies that will enable people to self-manage their careers over the long term (Hodgetts, 2009, p. 5).”

Takitini Rua Kāhui Ako

“The Village Raises the Child”

Location: Whanganui

Description: Takitini Rua Kāhui Ako, the Whanganui branch of the Kāhui Ako national initiative, is a collective of local education and training providers in Whanganui that form around children and young people’s learning pathways who work together to help them achieve their full potential.

Guided by their mission statement, “Our collective drive to maintain a focus on effective transitions and pathways for students and whānau through all sectors of learning in Whanganui anchored on the foundation of Hauora”, their aim is to enhance student progress, achievement and aspirations, while embedding effective teacher practice and wellbeing across the Whanganui educational sector. With this, they hope to foster “learners being grounded in who they are and where they are from, so they know where they are going.”

“You see a lot more pride in each student, and that comes from them knowing that they belong.”

“Kāhui Ako is a community of learning... what we’ve done is we’ve got six secondary schools, two intermediates... 28 primary schools, and 24 early childhood centres... if you can understand the community of learning, that’s what it is.”

“Relationships are the absolute key to everything that we are doing.”

“The first 1000 days of a kid’s life are the most important for lots of things, not just education and learning.”

“What we’ve shown, and what research has shown, is that if the transition is smooth, the kid has got a chance.”

“A big part of our journey is moving into a really collaborative approach and putting the student in the centre... so getting to know our students, the families they come from, how they learn, and also what is the aspirations of the family as we co-construct that journey together with the families, their children and the school.”



Envisioned Impact

This opportunity has the potential to transform the lives of students, empower educators, and benefit society as a whole. By implementing a student-centered educational development system, young individuals would gain access to tailored pathways that align with their unique strengths and interests, helping them to discover purpose and direction early in life.

This personalised approach could empower students to explore their passions, develop essential skills, and connect academic learning to real-world applications through workplace experiences and mentorship. These elements could not only boost confidence but also foster critical thinking, adaptability, and a growth mindset, all qualities essential for thriving in a rapidly evolving global economy.

For educators and the broader community, this system could cultivate a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, equipping schools to deliver high-quality, individualised guidance. With the support of industry partnerships and accessible career insights, schools could bridge the gap between education and employment, reducing skill mismatches and enhancing workforce readiness.

This holistic approach would not only benefit individual students but also contribute to a more equitable and prosperous society, where all young people are empowered to achieve their potential and drive meaningful change in their communities.

How might we create a student-centered career development system that equips young people with the guidance, knowledge, and confidence to explore diverse pathways and take meaningful next steps toward their future?



Bridging Insights to Action



As we conclude this report, we shift from exploring various aspects of secondary education to offering practical steps forward. In this final segment, we present high-level recommendations and key considerations that individuals and organisations can utilise to help them address disparities within their communities, regardless of their current stage in the process.

- What's in this Section:
- Recommendations: We present three strategic recommendations to turn the insights from this report into concrete actions. These include deepening research, initiating community-led action, and fostering ongoing learning—all of which can be supported by the Impact Collective by facilitating the collection of additional insights.
 - Considerations: We identify key considerations in addressing complex community concerns, such as cultural sensitivity, ethical practices, and adaptable strategies, to ensure actions meet diverse community needs. These considerations are essential for guiding the development of initiatives and ensuring any actions effectively implemented.

Recommendations

This section outlines three high-level recommendations designed to guide efforts in addressing disparities in secondary education. Each recommendation represents an important component in the broader Impact Collective co-design process (see Figure 11), from initial understanding through to the implementation and subsequent evaluation of solutions.

These recommendations are intentionally broad to avoid prescribing specific actions. They offer flexibility for individuals or organisations to adapt them based on their current stage in the journey toward an education landscape that fosters equity and wellbeing. These recommendations include: The recommendations include:

- Deepen Research: Invest in comprehensive research to enhance the understanding of the current secondary education landscape. This research will lay the groundwork for informed, community- and data-driven actions.
- Establish Community-Led Initiatives: Design and carry out community-led initiatives by using a co-design approach that encourages active community participation.
- Engage in Continuous Learning: Evaluate and adapt implemented solutions to ensure they remain effective, responsive, and aligned with evolving community needs.

Whether you are just beginning to gather knowledge, are in the process of developing and testing ideas, or are evaluating and evolving existing solutions, these recommendations aim to provide a non-linear roadmap for addressing disparities in secondary education.

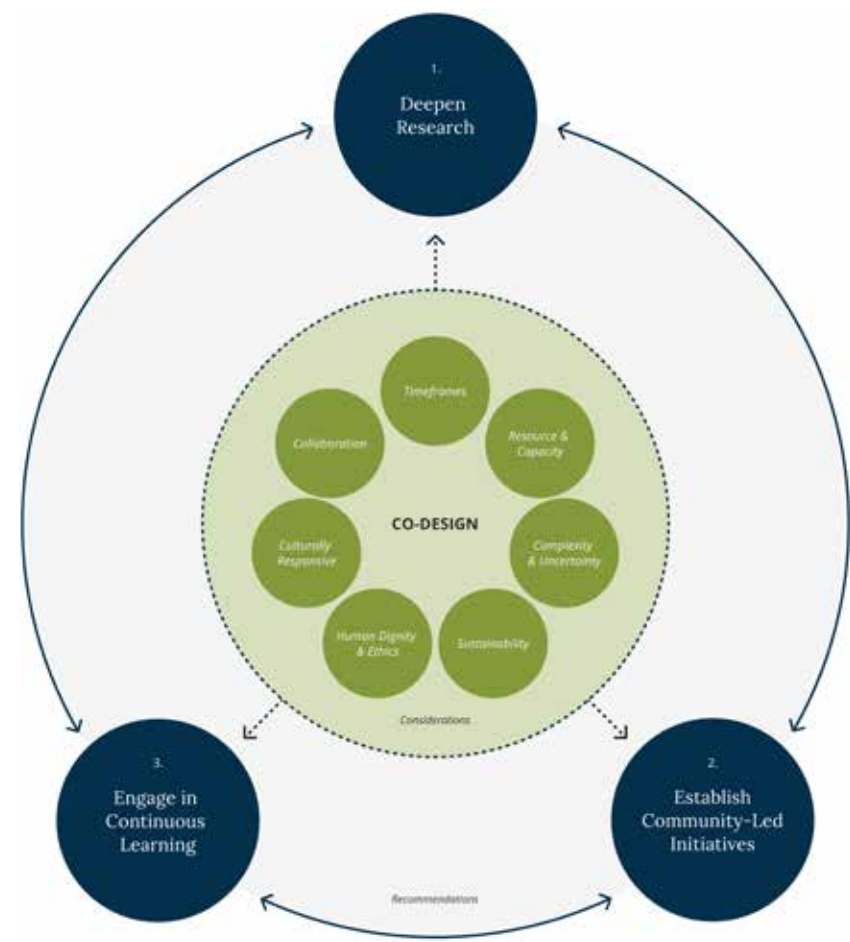


Figure 11 - High-level Impact Collective Co-Design Process.

Deepen Research

While this report provides an introductory view into the secondary education landscape at systemic, national, and individual levels, it represents just a ‘window’ into the wider topic. To comprehensively understand the myriad factors contributing to secondary education across different communities, we recommend undertaking further in-depth research. This is crucial because education is influenced by a multitude of socioeconomic, cultural, and personal factors, which are often interlinked. Additional research is necessary to fully grasp these complexities, ultimately ensuring that solutions are effectively tailored and responsive to the actual needs they aim to address.

Considerations:

- **Diverse Involvement:** It is essential to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including community members, schools (both mainstream and Māori medium education providers), students, whānau, and broader education support service providers. This inclusive approach ensures that a variety of perspectives, especially those with lived experience, contribute to richer insights while reducing the risk of one-sided or biased viewpoints.
- **Inclusive Research Design:** Ensure the research methodologies include both qualitative (data) and quantitative (personal narratives and lived-experiences) to enhance the validity of research.

Potential Action Steps:

- **Conduct Focus Groups and Discussions:** Conduct focus groups and one-on-one discussions with diverse groups to capture in-depth qualitative insights.
- **Partner with Support Programmes:** Partner with established support programmes to gain insight into their on-the-ground experiences.
- **Engage with National Experts:** Bring together experts from various fields to share their knowledge, latest research, findings, and best practices through dedicated engagement forums.

Establish Community-Led Initiatives

Building on the insights and opportunities identified in this report and through further independent research, we recommend engaging in community-led co-design to explore ways to improve secondary education outcomes. This process acts as an important bridge from research to practical application, ensuring that solutions are both rooted in community needs and shaped by direct involvement. By embedding the voices and priorities of those with lived experience at every stage, we enhance the relevance of the solutions and ensure they address real, tangible needs.

Active participation and ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders from the outset are crucial. Their involvement not only improves the effectiveness of solutions but also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the outcomes. By empowering participants to help shape solutions that may directly impact their lives, community-led initiatives significantly increase the likelihood of long-term success and sustainability.

The outputs from this co-design process can take many forms, such as policy changes, service enhancements, or community awareness campaigns. What matters most is that these outputs are responsive to and directly address the authentic needs of the community.

Considerations:

- **Diverse Representation:** Ensure the co-design process includes a broad and diverse representation of community members, especially those with lived or living experience and those who are often marginalised or underrepresented.
- **Building Local Capacity:** Building capacity within the community is important for effective participation in the co-design process. This can empower them to not only contribute more but also sustain and evolve the solutions independently over time.
- **Supportive Facilitation:** Effective facilitation is key to managing the co-design process. Facilitators should be adept in conflict resolution and encouraging productive discussions to ensure every participant feels heard and valued.
- **Design with Adaptability in Mind:** Design solutions with flexibility in mind, allowing for adjustments and pivots as new feedback is received. This adaptability is key to responding to the complex and ever-changing nature of complex community concerns.

Potential Action Steps:

- **Identify Areas for Intervention:** Utilise the insights from research to identify specific areas for potential solutions, focusing on those with the highest potential for addressing community needs.
- **Identify and Engage Key Stakeholders:** Identify and engage a diverse group of stakeholders who represent all facets of secondary education within the community. Ensure that all voices, especially those less heard, are included in the co-design process.
- **Facilitate Co-design Workshops:** Conduct workshops that bring together the identified stakeholders to collaboratively define problems, brainstorm solutions, and design solutions.
- **Prototyping and Testing Solutions:** Pilot the co-designed solutions in controlled settings or real-world contexts to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness. Iterate and adjust the solutions based on both stakeholder and community feedback and observed outcomes.
- **Share Successes with the Community:** Communicate the successes and lessons learned with the broader community to maintain trust, support, and engagement with those directly and indirectly involved.

Engage in Continuous Learning

As solutions addressing complex community concerns, such as education, are implemented, they must remain relevant over time. This relevance can only be sustained if soltuions continuously evolve to meet the changing needs and dynamics within the communities they serve. Therefore, we recommend establishing a cycle of continuous learning where stakeholders can actively participate in a dynamic process of reflection and adaptation. This ongoing cycle is crucial for assessing what is working, what could be improved, identifying new challenges, and integrating lessons along the way.

The importance of continuous evolution cannot be overstated—it ensures solutions remain responsive to the changing landscape of complex community concerns, preventing them from becoming outdated as needs shift. By using a process of continuous learning, solutions can adapt to new challenges and opportunities, thereby enhancing their long-term impact. This adaptive approach not only prevents stagnation but also ensures that solutions continuously align with the evolving needs of the community.

- Considerations:
- Support a Learning Culture: It is important to cultivate a culture that values learning and adaptation, where stakeholders are encouraged to view adaptations as opportunities for improvement rather than failures.
 - Inclusive Research Design: Gathering feedback using both qualitative and quantitative methods is essential, as this dual approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the solutions.
 - Assessing and Allocating Resources: Assigning adequate resources for the continuous learning process is essential to ensure sufficient funds, personnel, and time are dedicated to effectively support the iterative process of feedback collection, analysis, and implementation of changes.

- Potential Action Steps:
- Implement Feedback Mechanisms: Establish continuous feedback mechanisms to gather regular feedback and monitor the effectiveness of solutions. This can involve digital tools, feedback forms, and community hui (meetings).
 - Conduct Reviews and Impact Evaluations: Schedule regular review sessions and impact evaluations to assess the effectiveness of solutions in achieving desired outcomes.
 - Facilitate Reflective Workshops: Conduct workshops where stakeholders can reflect on their experiences, share successes, and discuss challenges, enabling them to collaborate on effective practices and areas needing adjustment.

“We need to change expectations, hopes, and goals to break out of intergenerational patterns.”

Workshop Participant.

Considerations

When addressing complex community concerns, it is crucial to identify and understand the key factors that can influence the success of solutions. This section summarises these factors, explaining their relevance and significance in effectively addressing community issues.

By considering these factors, stakeholders can better address root causes and maintain positive outcomes in both the short and long term. Moreover, taking these factors into account ensures that solutions are culturally sensitive, ethically sound, and responsive to the unique dynamics within the communities they aim to serve.

Following are a list of considerations to guide decision-making and action-taking processes for complex community concerns.

Timeframes

When addressing complex community concerns, it is important to set clear and realistic timelines for achieving milestones and objectives. Recognising that some goals may require extended periods to accomplish is essential. Additionally, maintaining flexibility to accommodate the evolving complexities of these challenges ensures that responses can adapt as situations change.

Resource and Capacity

It is essential to evaluate the availability and adequacy of resources—financial, human, and material—to determine if current resources meet the needs of proposed solutions. This evaluation will help ascertain whether additional funding is required, if staffing levels are adequate, or if there is a need to expand collaborations to effectively support and sustain initiatives.

Complexity and Uncertainty

Acknowledging the intricate and ever-evolving nature of complex community concerns is crucial to avoid oversimplification. These problems, often characterised by complexity, uncertainty, and intersectionality, cannot be effectively addressed with simple, isolated, one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, they require continual learning, flexible approaches, and more nuanced and tailored responses.

Sustainability

It is vital to adopt a long-term perspective when addressing complex community concerns is vital to ensure approaches are resilient, responsive, and capable of adapting to and withstanding evolving conditions over time. With this approach, solutions are more likely to contribute to lasting benefits rather than providing temporary relief.

Human Dignity and Ethics

When addressing complex community issues, it is important to respect and uphold the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of everyone involved. Discussing topics such as family harm or mental health can be particularly sensitive, especially for vulnerable people. Therefore, adopting this approach is vital for creating safe, inclusive, and trusted environments, and supporting the development of long-term, positive change within communities.

Culturally Responsive

With certain populations disproportionately affected by complex community concerns, it is essential to understand and respect the cultural backgrounds and specific needs of the community being served. Cultural awareness is key to ensuring that approaches are culturally reflective and appropriately tailored. This involves aligning solutions with the diverse values, traditions, and challenges of varied communities to ensure effectiveness and acceptance.

Collaboration

Fostering collaboration among diverse services—including healthcare providers, law enforcement, social services, and community organisations—is important when addressing complex community concerns. This collaboration ensures that people receive holistic support, addressing various aspects of their wellbeing comprehensively. By working together, services can significantly enhance their impact, providing more integrated and effective solutions for the community.

Conclusion

The secondary education system in Aotearoa New Zealand faces persistent challenges, with socioeconomic disparities disproportionately affecting Māori, Pasifika, and low-decile school students. Addressing systemic inequities such as resource gaps, implicit bias, and barriers to engagement is essential to ensure every student has access to high-quality, equitable education.

Issues such as mental health, attendance, and teacher shortages further highlight the need for urgent systemic reform and strategic action. By fostering engagement, strong relationships, and wellbeing-focused initiatives, schools can create safer, more inclusive environments where students feel valued and motivated to succeed.

The way forward is collective. We call on educators, policymakers, and communities to work together to create lasting change. By addressing root causes and prioritising equity, we can build a future where every young person thrives, ensuring education becomes a foundation for opportunity and wellbeing for all.

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