



TĀTOU



Ministry of Education

Attendance and Engagement – Research Report – July 2022

Contents

P.3	Executive Summary
P.5	Research approach and methodology
P.6	Important contextual information
P.7	Barriers and Motivations
P.8	Cultural concerns specific to Māori and Pasifika
P.9	Concepts and Findings
P.10	Territory 1 Showcasing the value of school beyond classwork
P.18	Territory 1 The network of people that impact student attendance
P.26	Suggestions for improvement
P.29	Acknowledgements
P.32	Appendices

“Take care of our children.

*Take care of what they hear, take care of
what they see, take care of how they feel.*

*For how the children grow, so will be the
shape of Aotearoa”*

Dame Whina Cooper

Executive Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to gather insights and feelings towards a potential campaign that will be run by the Ministry of Education about school attendance and engagement.

This research was undertaken by Tātou and Rutherford Consulting, on behalf of the Ministry of Education.

Hui, Talanoa sessions and meetings were conducted over a two week period in which we spoke to **over 250 ākongā, students, parents, caregivers, community leaders, kaiako and teachers** across the entire breadth of Aotearoa.

Two creative concepts, prepared by Stanley Street, were tested. These were:

- **The value of school beyond 'education'.**
- **The network of people that impact student attendance.**

We did not take lightly the honour and privilege to hold hui and talanoa sessions with our communities. Meaningful engagement to us, meant that we allowed our audiences the opportunity to speak genuinely about their lived experiences, including talking to the barriers and motivations they faced. These are also included in the findings of this report.

Our Project Principles:

Community engagement:

It was critical that we involve the audience that this campaign is intended to reach, in the development process, so that they could identify which campaign concept would be the most effective.

Culturally-centred approach to research:

We have strong awareness of **culture**, knowledge concerning cultural aspects of an individual, group, family or community, and we conducted this research in line with **tikanga Māori and Pasifika values**. This included karakia/ prayer, whakawhanaungatanga, kai, being introduced to communities through respected community leaders, and meeting people in spaces familiar to them, e.g. church and marae.

Test & Learn:

Testing these concepts with the audience helps to confirm that we understand how they feel towards the images, messaging and elements, for this campaign and future ones.

Methodology

Tātou was responsible for facilitating hui/talanoa sessions with **Māori** and **Pasifika** communities, and Rutherford Consulting facilitated focus groups with a representative sample of the **general population** across Aotearoa.

We performed over 40 semi-structured focus groups both online and in person.

The original brief of these sessions was to discuss their feelings and opinions towards each of the territories that were developed. By way of prompting this conversation, we used the following types of questions which were focused on overall idea, messaging, imagery and wording:

- **What they thought the message was trying to convey**
- **Who they thought each message was targeted at and;**
- **What they thought about the imagery and wording used throughout.**

Whilst the kaupapa was about testing territories, it also our hope that the findings of this report will provide rich insights that can be used beyond the original scope.

It is our hope that these voices can influence and impact future work programmes to provide meaningful value to our communities.

Executive Summary

Key Learnings

- The first concept was consistent with the biggest motivator that students attributed to their attendance and engagement at school, which was **social interactions and activities outside the classroom.**
- Any message that is associated with education **needs to be positively framed.**
- The consequential language of “when you miss school, you miss out, was not appreciated by any of the audiences and they thought it was ignorant to the **many reasons that influence a child’s ability to attend school, or not.**
- A number of audiences expressed that the messages and images were **inconsistent with their realities at school and could be seen as misleading.**
- Using facts as a way to support key messaging was appreciated, however many audiences were already aware of low attendance rates and suggested **these statements should not be provided without accompanying information about what supports are available to them and their children.**
- The concepts **need to be more inclusive of all ethnicities, cultures and abilities,** so that all of Aotearoa are prompted by the message.
- There are many **systemic failures that prevent Māori and Pasifika students and parents from feeling safe and supported at school.**
- Teachers make (or break) a child’s experience at school, and often our **Māori and Pasifika students feel that they have already been written off,** and lack a support person or people to believe in their potential.
- Students from all cultures expressed that they are **not receiving enough support from teachers when they are at school** which makes it discouraging to continue attending.
- There is **wear-out in the appeal of ‘do it for your community’ and people in large urban city seems to be fatigued** and turned-off by this request.
- **Social norms towards regular attendance appear to have shifted** with a more lenient attitude following Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns.
- Suggestions of ways communities could provide **support for students was vague and unclear,** and people couldn’t easily articulate what they could do to help students improve their school experience.
- The concepts also raised questions about **who has permission to help?** And how can this permission be broadened in a constructive manner? The last concept failed in this regard.

This report shares the whakaaro of four different audience groups, across a range of different cultures and geographical spread

Ākonga: Yrs 1-8

Māori - 18
 Pasifika - 31
 General Population - 14

23% of participants

Ākonga: Yrs 9-13

Māori - 17
 Pasifika - 37
 General Population - 14

25% of participants

Parents/ Caregivers

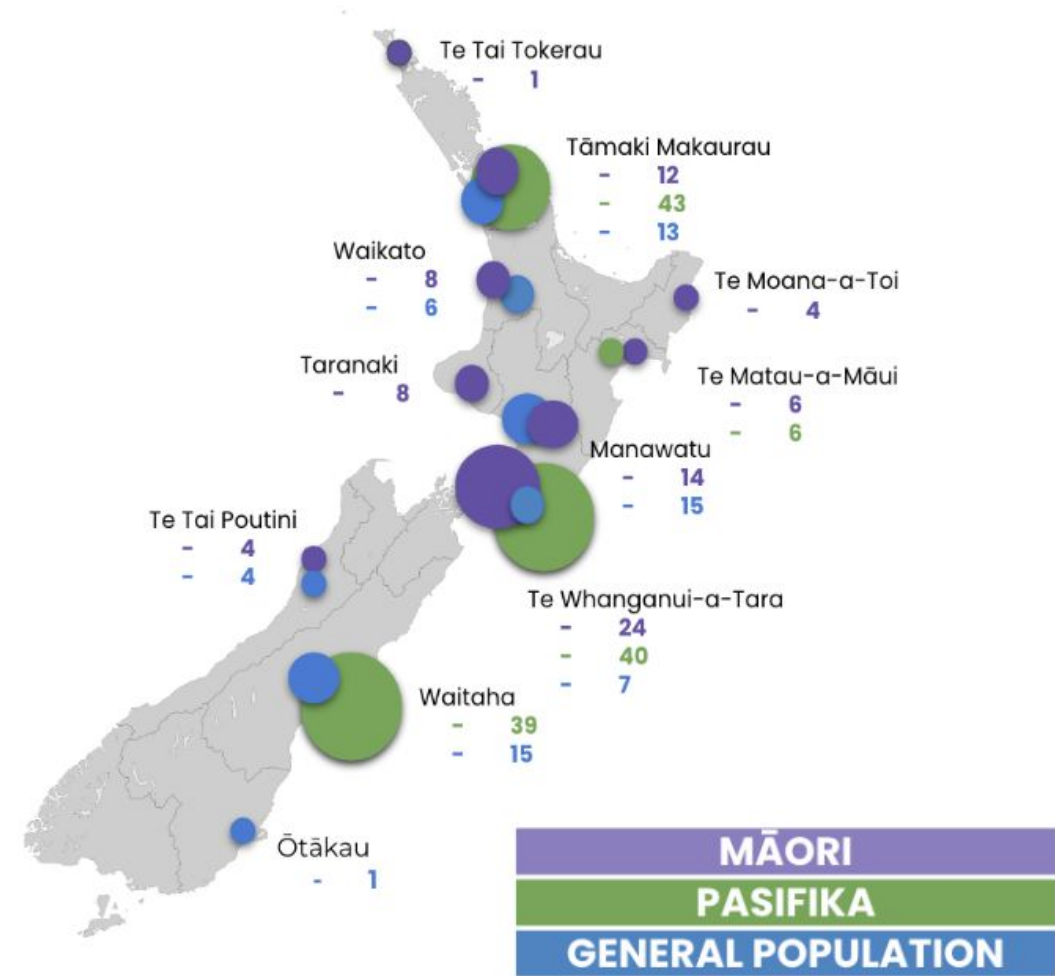
Māori - 40
 Pasifika - 48
 General Population - 14

39% of participants

Influencers/ Educators/ Kaiako

Māori - 8
 Pasifika - 12
 General Population - 17

13% of participants





Important contextual information

Genuine engagement meant allowing participants the freedom to share whakaaro and discuss anything that is relative to their education experience.

Barriers and motivators to attendance and engagement

Ākonga: Yrs 1–8

Ākonga: Yrs 9–13

Parents/ Caregivers

Influencers

MOTIVATORS

- Maintaining their friendships was a big part of their reasons for attending, there were a lot of comments of not wanting to let their school friends down.
- Learning their favourite subjects.
- Participating in school activities - playing at lunch, sports and P.E.
- Learning more about other cultures.
- There is an expectation from their parents that they attend school and get an education for their future.
- They get to see their friends at school.
- School activities - sports, formals and cultural performance groups.
- Supportive teachers that they feel they can talk to.
- Getting NCEA qualifications in order to graduate, and go on to tertiary education.
- Leadership roles and responsibilities within their school.
- Children get to build relationships outside of their family unit.
- They gain the communication and social skills needed for the future.
- Parents understand that they can't teach their children everything they need to know at home so school supplements those learnings.
- They are able to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, kapa haka, poly group.
- Having a warm and inviting space to go to.
- Participation in things outside the normal routine.
- Getting to catch up with their friends.
- Supportive teachers & school community.
- Place to express themselves.

BARRIERS

- No friends or being bullied.
- Children who have been absent, find it hard to catch back up on work.
- Sickness.
- Lack of motivation to wake up and get there on time.
- When parents argue or there is friction in their home dynamic, some students are forced to stay home.
- Roles and responsibilities at home, some students have to work to support their families or take care of their younger siblings.
- Anxiety and mental health.
- Covid-19 and other sickness.
- Lack of supportive teachers or strained relationships between the student and school community.
- Costs: Not having enough money for the bus or train, no lunch, or unable to afford the adequate school uniform.
- Poverty: Parents cannot afford transport, lunches and uniform costs to send their child to school regularly.
- The current rules and protocols around sickness at school resulting in children missing long periods of time due to self isolation or staff shortages.
- Parents who don't, or are unable to engage with their children to understand their educational needs.
- Lack of support from their families and communities.
- Money problems affecting the parents ability to afford school necessities.
- Home life can affect the child going to school as parents don't want to send their child after going through a traumatic experience such as parent arguments, funerals and family events.

Cultural concerns specific to Māori and Pasifika

- It is important to all parents that their children feel empowered to take control of their own success and their futures. **Māori and Pasifika parents struggle to see that this is the reality for their children** and constantly see their tamariki slip through the cracks.
- Teachers make (or break) a child's experience at school, and often our **Māori and Pasifika students feel that they have already been written off**, and lack a support person, or people to believe in their potential.
- There are many **systemic failures that prevent Māori and Pasifika students and parents from feeling safe and supported at school.**
- Parents expressed that our education system treats teachers as subject knowledge holders and students as objects that are just to be talked at and filled with their ideologies. This approach to teaching means that students are not always taught to be critical and does not embrace the many teachings and learnings that are offered in the home, and **the richness of learnings that is provided through culture.**
- Māori students need to be recognized as having some **unique differences, which include Matauranga Māori**, Māori language, Māori identity, and it needs to be more widely available for them to achieve as Māori, in both kura kaupapa and mainstream schools.
- It was suggested that this campaign was an attempt by policy and decision makers to direct their efforts at attendance, meanwhile avoiding the fact that the major contributor to the lack of engagement by our tamariki are the **systemic failures that do not equitably meet our children's needs.**
- In addition to education disparities, Māori and Pasifika children make up a large proportion to those children in poverty. Research highlights that *"those in poverty are at an increased risk of poor development and limited educational outcomes. **This in turn affects their chances of receiving and interpreting formal education as it is intended"***
- Change needs to be made to the institutional arrangements of education and schooling, and we need to provide **a curriculum that speaks to all of its, akonga**, not just the dominant culture.
- The hope is that education systems continue to **seek the voice of ngā rangatira mo apōpō**, and put pressure on the structures to grow and develop more tailored policies that cater to the actual needs of our tamariki and rangatahi, not just the assumed needs.