

Briefing Note: December update on the Urgent Response Fund (COVID-19)

To	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Cc	Hon Kelvin Davis, Associate Minister of Education Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education Hon Aupito William Sio, Associate Minister of Education		
Date	11 December 2020	Priority	Medium
Security Level	In Confidence	METIS No	1245690
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Messaging seen by Communications team	No	Round Robin	No

Purpose of Report

This report updates you on the Urgent Response Fund (URF), including:

- analysis of the distribution of funding to date
- the needs being identified and supports being put in place
- our approach to monitoring the progress being made by the schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo in delivering the URF and the interim outcomes being achieved.

Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.


☒ Agree ☐ Disagree

Summary

- The URF provides \$50 million in 2020/21 to support children and young people's attendance, re-engagement with learning and wellbeing following the COVID-19 lockdowns. Over \$28 million of URF funding has been distributed to date.


Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement & Support Group

9 / 12 / 2020


Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

10 / 02 / 2021

Background

1. The Urgent Response Fund (URF) provides \$50 million in 2020/21 to support children and young people's attendance, re-engagement with learning and wellbeing after the COVID-19 lockdowns.
2. We have used the Equity Index (EQI) to allocate the URF funding to regions¹. The regional Directors of Education approve applications, working with regional sector groups, to ensure that local knowledge and priorities inform funding decisions.
3. This update follows previous monthly reports since September [METIS 1239151, 1242528 and 1244130 refer] and fortnightly updates in the Education Weekly Update (EWU).

Allocation of URF funding to 25 November 2020

4. Annex 1 provides a national summary of the allocation of URF funding to 25 November 2020. We have approved 2,976 applications to the URF totalling \$28.5 million.
5. In the latest four-week period, 583 applications valued at \$5.6 million were approved. These 583 applications together support 57,361 ākonga. This compares with 915 applications valued at \$8.2 million in the previous four-week period.
6. At 25 November, 12% of the funding to date has been allocated to early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo. This is an increase from 10% at 28 October and reflects the engagement that regional Directors of Education and their teams have had with the early learning sector to support access to the URF.
7. The URF continues to be an important part of the response to COVID-19 disruption to schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo in Auckland. The Auckland region has allocated 59% of its funds, slightly higher than the 57% nationally. In Auckland, 75% of eligible schools and kura² have received URF funding compared with 62% nationally.
8. From the middle of October (the start of term four) the number of new URF applications submitted each week has remained consistently between 100 and 200. This compares to a high of over 800 in a single week at the end of August. Schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo submitted 619 new URF applications in the four-week period to 25 November, compared with just over 500 in the previous period. This brings the total at 25 November to 4,901 applications.
9. Of the almost 5,000 applications submitted, 61% have been approved (up from 56% at 28 October). The number and proportion of approved applications continues to increase month on month, as regional sector groups and Ministry regional staff support the sector to put in well considered applications which meet the scope of the fund³.
10. Directors of Education and their teams continue to work closely with their regional groups to plan for the start of the 2021 school year. In some regions, this has involved agreeing to hold off approving further applications from a specified date in order to clear the way for a well considered start to term one in 2021.

¹ The Equity Index weights funding to regions with relatively higher levels of disadvantage, where the impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing, attendance, and engagement will be most significant.

² Eligible schools and kura includes state schools, state integrated schools, ngā kura kaupapa Māori, ngā Kura a Iwi, special schools.

³ Where an application is out of scope, or needs an amendment, regional staff work closely with the applicant to help them to refocus their application and resubmit if needed.

Schools and kura in receipt of URF funding

11. Each month, we analyse the profile of the schools and kura with approved URF applications. This is shown in Annex 1. Profile data is used to support local decision making and identify opportunities for targeting the URF.
12. Overall, low decile schools and kura, and their ākonga, are well represented in the proportion of URF funding received. There are however still a significant proportion of low decile schools and kura that have not yet accessed support through the URF.
13. Nationally, the percentage of Māori learners in schools and kura with approved URF applications is slightly lower than the percentage of Māori learners in all eligible schools and kura. In comparison, the percentage of Pacific learners in schools and kura with approved URF applications is slightly higher than the percentage of Pacific learners in all eligible schools and kura.
14. Regional staff are actively working with schools and kura to ensure the URF is reaching priority learners. This includes using education advisors and service managers to communicate directly with principals and tumuaki and working alongside the tumuaki and kaiako at kura to develop applications. In Auckland, a significant portion of the regional funding has been allocated specifically to support applications related to indigenous pathways, Pacific education, low decile schools and schools with high proportions of Māori learners [METIS 1244130 refers].
15. We will continue to use regional channels to engage low decile schools and kura and those with high proportions of priority learners (particularly Māori learners) to ensure equitable access to the URF.
16. Term three attendance data collection has recently been completed. We will use the updated attendance data to analyse the distribution of the URF and inform regional engagement with schools and kura. We will provide an update on this in the next briefing.

Early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo in receipt of URF funding

17. In Annex 1 we have analysed the profile of early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo with approved URF applications.
18. Nationally, the percentage of both Māori and Pacific learners in early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo which have approved URF applications is slightly higher than the percentage of Māori and Pacific learners in all eligible early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo.
19. Early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo with an EQI rating of 1-4 are receiving a higher proportion of URF funding than those with a rating of 5+⁴. To date, 58% of the funding to the early learning sector has gone to organisations with an EQI rating of 1-4, while only 31% of learners are enrolled in these services.
20. Maintaining a focus on early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo with high proportions of priority learners and low EQI ratings will continue to be important through the allocation of the URF.

⁴ The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Service EQI measures the extent to which an ECE service draws its children from low socio-economic communities (using five socio-economic factors). It is calculated on the basis of child address data gathered through a family survey and is matched to Census data. ECE Services (including kōhanga reo) with an EQI between 1 and 4 are eligible for Equity Funding.

Needs and interventions

21. Annex 2 provides examples included in URF applications in the four-weeks to 25 November. Over this period, responding to the needs of ākonga who are experiencing anxiety (themselves or within their whānau) remains a focus across all age groups. Using the URF to fund teacher aides/kaiawhina also continues to be a common approach to support ākonga.

Understanding the impact of the URF

22. On 16 November, we launched an online interim outcomes survey with the education providers that received URF funding by the start of term four. We asked 1,136 schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo to report back on their progress in using the URF and the difference being made for ākonga.
23. At 3 December, we had received almost a 50% response rate. Regional staff are engaging with schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo to further increase response rates, focusing on those with high value applications.
24. The survey deadline has been extended to 11 December to give participants more time to respond. Detailed analysis will be prepared for early 2021 and will inform the allocation of the URF for the remainder of the funding period.

Next Steps

25. We will continue to update you fortnightly in the EWU on key metrics for the URF, and we will continue to update this Briefing Note monthly from February 2021⁵.

Proactive Release

26. We recommend that this Briefing is proactively released as per your expectation that information be released as soon as possible. Any information which may need to be withheld will be done so in line with the provisions of the Official Information Act 1982.

Annexes

- Annex 1: National summary of URF allocation (4 August to 25 November 2020)
- Annex 2: Examples of needs and interventions (from applications approved 28 October to 25 November 2020)

⁵ We do not intend to provide a Briefing Note in early January and will instead report on two months of URF activity in February 2021.

COVID-19 URGENT RESPONSE FUND – National summary of URF allocation (4 August to 25 November 2020)

We have approved 2,976 applications to the URF totalling \$28.5m. The URF is currently supporting 331,462 learners, more than 152,000 of whom are in Auckland.

Early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo

- 33,029 learners supported across 522 services*
- 552 approved applications, valued at \$3.3m
- Average funding of \$101 per learner

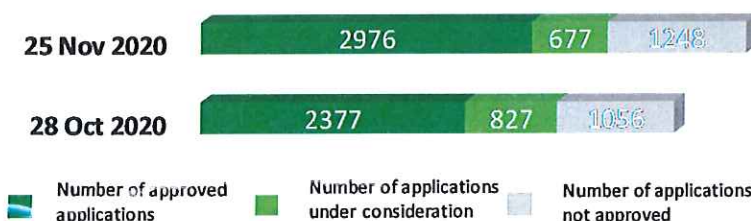
Schools and kura

- 298,433 learners supported across 1,520 schools and kura*
- 2,424 approved applications valued at \$25.1m
- Average funding of \$84 per learner

*Cluster applications are attributed to the main applicant.

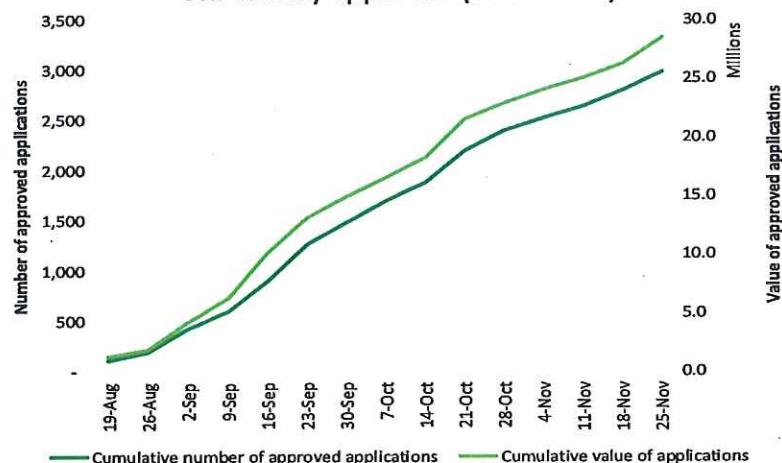
At 25 November, 61% of the 4,901 submitted applications have been approved.

Pipeline of URF applications



Both the number and value of applications has continued to increase steadily through term four.

URF weekly approvals (cumulative)

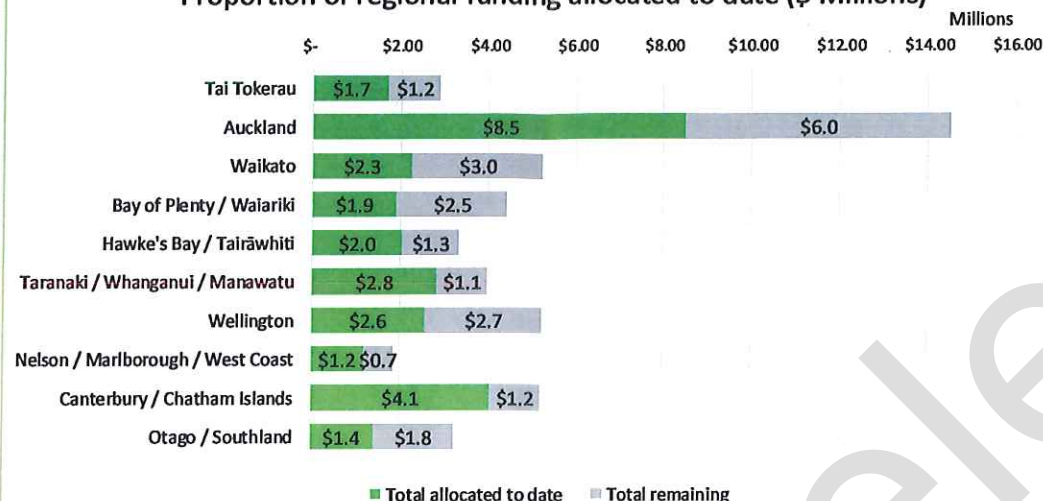


Of the 795 eligible decile 1-3 schools and kura across New Zealand, 38% (302) have not received URF funding. This is 68 fewer than at 28 October. Note: A small number of schools with URF funding do not have decile information and are therefore not included in the chart.

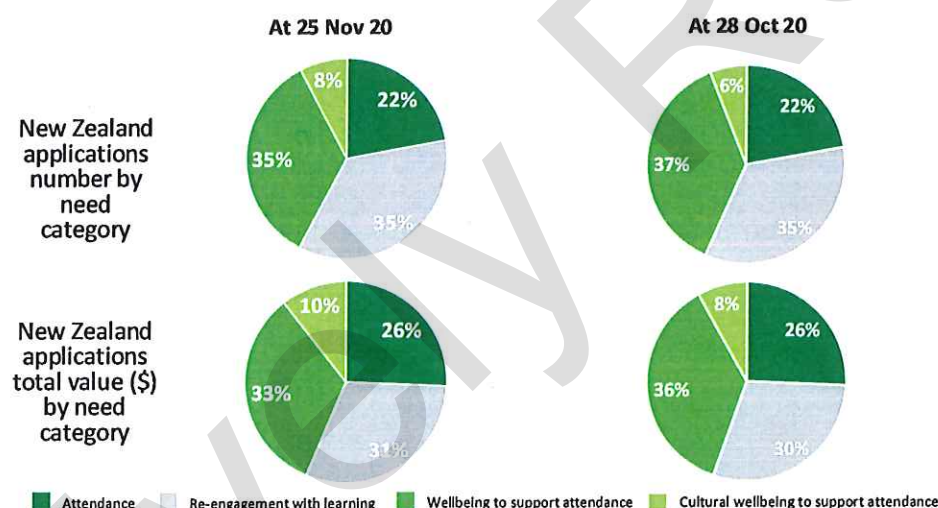
	Decile										Total
New Zealand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Total eligible schools and kura in region	297	255	243	238	245	226	244	233	229	234	2,444
Eligible schools and kura without URF funding	126	94	82	70	99	87	99	90	86	95	928
Percentage of eligible schools and kura without URF funding	42%	37%	34%	29%	40%	38%	41%	39%	38%	41%	38%

Nationally, 57% of the URF has been allocated. For the period 28 October to 25 November 2020, Auckland allocated 10% (\$1.5m) of its \$14.5m allocation.

Proportion of regional funding allocated to date (\$ Millions)

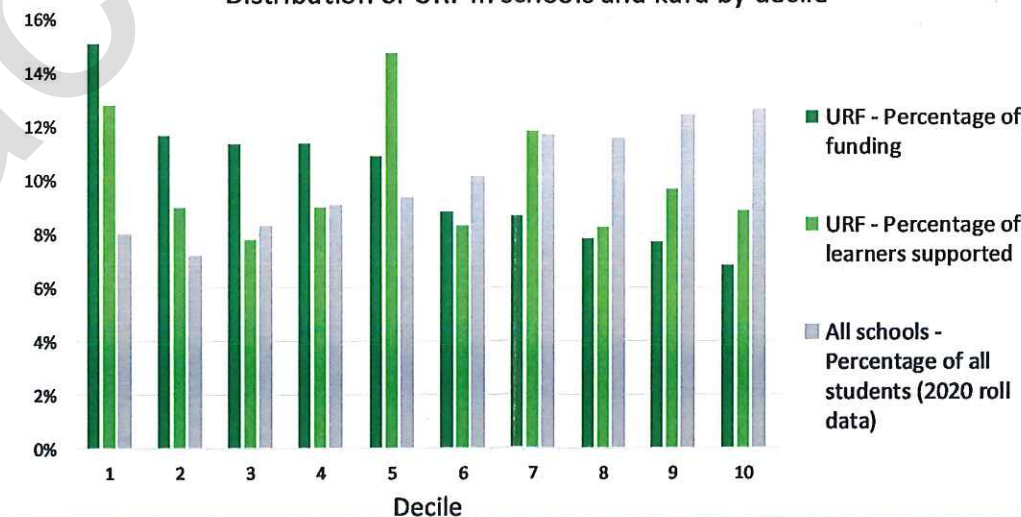


The distribution of the number and value of applications by primary category of need has remained stable since 28 October.



Nationally, 38% of the funding approved for schools and kura has been for deciles 1-3. Decile 1-3 schools and kura account for 23% of all students. Note: The spike in the percentage of learners being supported in decile 5 is due to five large, cluster based applications which account for almost 20,000 learners.

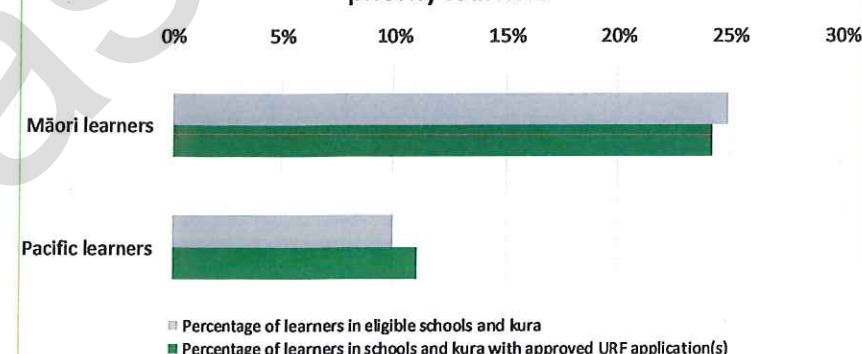
Distribution of URF in schools and kura by decile



Analysis of the profile of schools, kura, early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo with approved URF applications supports local decision making and engagement

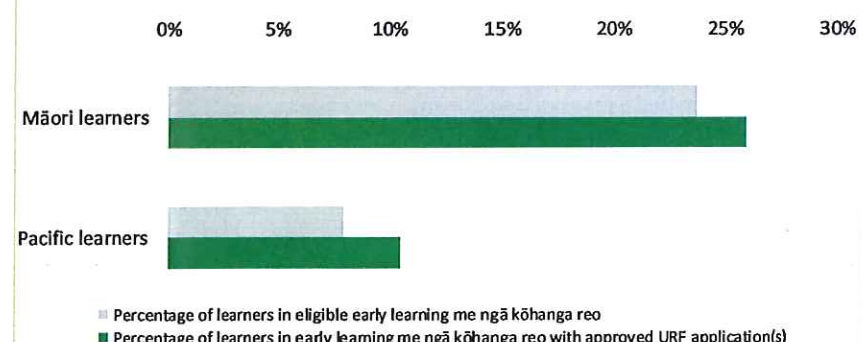
It is important to ensure schools and kura with high proportions of Māori learners have equitable access to the URF

Distribution of URF in schools and kura by percentage of priority learners



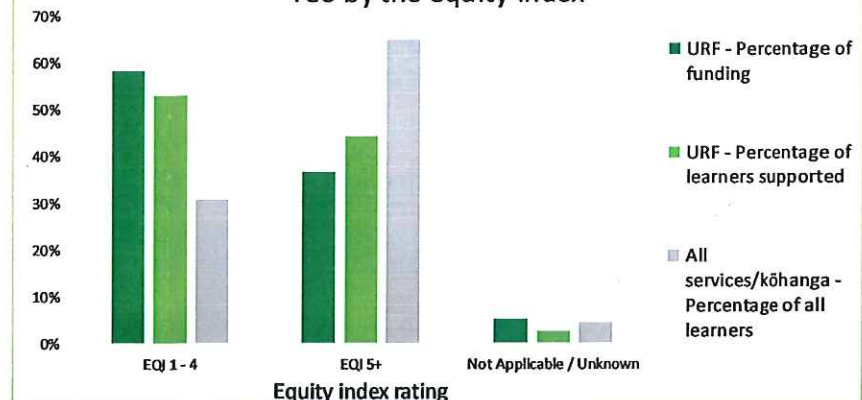
The percentage of priority learners in early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo with URF funding is higher than the percentage in all eligible services

Distribution of URF in early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo by percentage of priority learners



Nationally, 58% of the URF funding approved for early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo has been for those with an equity index rating of 1-4. These services account for 31% of all learners.

Distribution of URF in early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo by the equity index



Notes:
School rolls data is from July 2020 roll returns.
Early learning rolls data is from ELI, the Early Learning Information System.
The EQI (ECE equity index) measures the extent to which an ECE service draws its children from low socio-economic communities (using five socio-economic factors) and is calculated on the basis of child address data gathered through a family survey and is matched to Census data.

COVID-19 Urgent Response Fund – Examples of needs and interventions (from applications approved 28 October – 25 November)

Attendance

Early learning

A group of early learning centres in the Hawke's Bay have experienced a decline in enrolments and attendance. They are seeing whānau in their community unable to engage and build meaningful relationships with the centres. Some whānau had to relocate because of financial hardships and some have experienced a breakdown of relationships at home. Parents are looking to the centres for support to help their tamariki cope with mental health, social and emotional wellbeing issues at home. The centres recognise that whānau will be comfortable in participating in early learning when they feel supported. The centres want to reconnect with whānau in their community to build a network of support, and to build whanaungatanga to develop a sense of belonging within the community. They intend to employ a local facilitator to work across the centres to provide support to whānau to strengthen the relationships between homes, the community and the centres, with a view to increasing attendance.

Primary and secondary

A Tai Tokerau school catering for years 1 to 13 has experienced a decline in students attending regularly because of students and their whānau experiencing anxiety due to COVID-19. While teachers are doing their best to keep students engaged in learning, the underlying anxiety that the school community feels has reduced attendance. The school created a wellbeing programme for students during breaktimes to promote positive relationships, participation and physical education. The URF will fund a sensory space set up for students to use any time during the day to reduce feelings of anxiety. It will also fund a teacher aide employed to help implement the programme alongside their SENCO team.

A secondary school in the Bay of Plenty has a Māori immersion unit that supports transitions for their Māori students. COVID-19 has made it difficult for the school to keep students engaged and attending school regularly within the immersion unit. Students feel that they are not connected with the wider school community. The school will employ a kaiawhina to support students in creating and maintaining connections with the wider school community, and to support them with their transition between year levels.

Re-engagement with learning

Early learning

A small centre in Southland has been concerned for the wellbeing of their tamariki since returning from lockdown. Many of their whānau have lost jobs and are currently searching for employment, and other families have left. Tamariki are anxious, unsettled and struggling to engage in learning. There is a noticeable change in their play and dynamics. The URF will support new resources to help engage tamariki in sustained learning activities with a focus on working together with their peers and kaiako. Through these activities, the centre aims to rebuild the sense of wellbeing and security for tamariki within the centre.

Primary and secondary

In Wellington, a primary school is having trouble in re-engaging year 1 new entrant students in learning. The school saw a continuous decline in the attendance of this cohort, and many of the new entrants are below the school's curriculum achievement expectations in reading and writing. The school intends to implement an early intervention programme to run targeted support groups for their year 1 new entrant cohort.

In Southland, a secondary school is experiencing a decrease in students attending regularly and an increase in students being stood down. Students are disengaged from their learning and feel unmotivated coming back from lockdown. The school sees an increase in behavioural and trust issues within students because of the uncertainty that COVID-19 has produced. The school plans to employ additional staff to produce curriculum resources to support students' learning and plan pathways for higher education and training. The school will also partner with community organisations to develop a forum for students and their whānau to build relationships with the wider community, and to see potential opportunities beyond secondary school.

Wellbeing to support attendance

Early learning

In Auckland, some tamariki have found it difficult to feel settled, secure and confident in an early learning centre coming back from lockdown. Tamariki attach themselves to certain kaiako and are displaying behavioural difficulties. The centre intends to support the social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing of tamariki by employing a teacher aide to develop more quality one-to-one interactions.

Primary and secondary

In Tauranga, a primary school is facing challenges with students experiencing anxiety. Students have difficulty self-regulating and are displaying negative behaviours as a result of the anxiety. The school intends to use additional teacher aides to help students feel secure and develop resiliency skills.

An intermediate school in Wellington is seeing an increase in the number of students who are experiencing stress, anxiety, lack of social skills, depression and suicidal thoughts. The school recognised that attendance and engagements has been impacted by COVID-19. The school wants to be proactive in reducing wellbeing issues, and they are intending to implement a programme that allows students to have a wellbeing check-in so they can communicate how they feel and why they are feeling that way. They also want to invest in an online wellbeing tool to promote resiliency skills within students.

A secondary school in Wellington is seeing an increase in demand for counselling support from their school guidance counsellor. Students are reporting high levels of anxiety, depression, and issues with relationship breakdowns at home. There is also an increase of referrals coming from whānau, and parents are looking to the school to gain strategies to support their children at home. The school referred some students to local counselling organisations to deal with the increase in counselling demand within their school community. The school intends to employ an additional counsellor to support a whole-school wellbeing initiative, and to provide more targeted support to students.

Cultural wellbeing to support attendance

Early learning

In Gisborne, a group of kindergartens are seeing stressed and anxious parents of tamariki. The kindergartens also see that tamariki, over half of whom are Māori, feel disconnected from their cultural identity and language. It is important to build an understanding of their own heritage and identity at an early stage, and this feeling of disconnection increases the anxiety that whānau feel. The kindergartens are intending to employ a kaiarahi reo to work directly with tamariki and their whānau to support te reo, build partnerships with the community, and support transitions to kura.

Primary and secondary

A primary school in Waikato saw an increase in disengagement from their Māori ākonga and whānau following the lockdown. The school recognises that there is a need to build relationships with whānau, and to strengthen the cultural identity of ākonga to support engagement in learning. The school intends to employ four Māori mentors to support the cultural identity of their Māori ākonga by teaching them about tikanga and mahi toi. The mentors will work with whānau to build a sense of belonging in the wider school community. The school also sees this as an opportunity to build stronger relationships with local iwi.

In Wellington, a secondary school is holding a camp for Year 9 to 13 Pacific students to build a sense of belonging, and to promote engagement in learning. The camp will focus on a range of areas, from building relationships to learning cultural dance. It will provide a forum to get NCEA support for those requiring additional credits and will also use guest speakers to help build pathways towards STEM industries.