

Briefing Note: Report on the Urgent Response Fund – Interim Outcomes Survey

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		
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Drafter:	Georgina Muir	DDI:	9(2)(a)
Key Contact:	Susan Howan	DDI:	
Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of paper

This paper provides you with information on the outcomes of the Urgent Response Fund – Interim Outcomes Survey and next steps.

Agree that this Briefing will be proactively released.

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**

Summary

- The URF - Interim Outcomes Survey ('the survey') was completed by 638 schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo through November and December 2020. It captures information about the progress being made delivering the Urgent Response Fund (URF), and the interim outcomes that have been achieved from the perspective of the respondent.
- Overall, the findings of the survey are positive and show how, for most respondents, the URF-funded support is progressing and achieving the desired outcomes for learners across all four areas of need – attendance, re-engagement with learning, wellbeing and cultural wellbeing.
- The findings suggest however that URF support may not be reaching ākonga Māori and this requires addressing urgently (before the completion of the fund).

- While this not a formal evaluation of the fund, the findings in this report can inform and support planning for learners and future URF decisions at both national and regional levels.



Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement & Support

25/2/21



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

25/3/21

Background

Urgent Response Fund

1. The Urgent Response Fund (URF) provides \$50 million in 2020/21 to support children and young people who need extra help, especially in terms of attendance, their re-engagement with learning, and safeguarding and promoting their wellbeing after the COVID-19 lockdowns.
2. The fund is available to schools, kura, and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo to help address attendance issues, and support wellbeing, cultural wellbeing and re-engagement in learning.¹
3. We used the Equity Index to allocate the URF funding to regions.² The regional Directors of Education approve applications, working with regional advisory groups³, to ensure that local knowledge and priorities inform funding decisions.
4. At 17 February 2021, \$34.8 million of URF funding had been allocated, which represents 70% of the total \$50 million.

Interim Outcomes Survey

5. We conducted the online URF - Interim Outcomes Survey ('the survey') to capture information about the progress made by schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo in delivering the URF, and the interim outcomes that have been achieved.
6. The purpose of the survey was to:
 - a. report on the early effectiveness of the URF;
 - b. inform Ministry planning and support for learners, schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo; and
 - c. inform future decisions at both national and regional levels.
7. The survey was developed by the Ministry's Sector Enablement and Support group with input from the Ministry's Evidence, Data and Knowledge group, Ministry regional staff and their regional advisory groups. Ministry regional staff have also been involved in the interpretation of the survey findings.
8. The survey was sent on 18 November 2020, to 1,081 schools, kura and early learning centres me ngā kōhanga reo with approved URF applications for which they received funding before the start of Term 4. Regional Ministry staff engaged with recipients to increase response rates before the survey formally closed on 11 December 2020.
9. In undertaking the survey, we sought to balance the need for timely and robust feedback on the impact of URF funding with operational demands on the sector:

¹ The fund is available to:

- Licensed early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo: play centre, ngā puna reo, kindergarten, education & care services (including casual) and home-based early learning services (excluding au pair).
- Schools and kura: state schools, state integrated schools, ngā kura kaupapa Māori, ngā Kura a Iwi, specialist schools.

² 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.

³ Regional advisory groups include representation from primary and secondary schools, kura, early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo, and mana whenua.

- We made the survey quick and simple for respondents to maximise response rates and complete data collection before the end of term 4. This was to make the survey data available as early as possible in the new year to inform future URF decisions at both national and regional levels.
 - The information provided in the responses is from the perspective of the person completing the survey⁴ and will therefore be subject to self-rater bias. We chose not to seek direct input from learners, whānau, teachers or other staff as we considered this would put an additional burden on the sector. Therefore, the findings presented in this report have not been validated against a second data source.
10. As an interim survey undertaken part way through the 12-month life of the fund some respondents had had more time than others to implement the funding, and therefore had made more progress. The total value of applications on which survey respondents provided information is \$8.1 million. This represents 23% of the URF spent to date.
 11. The profile of the institutions that were sent the survey may not reflect the profile of all the institutions that have received URF funding since. The timing of the survey meant that it caught 'early movers' on the URF - those that had submitted an application that was approved and paid before the start of Term 4. We have provided analysis of survey respondents as part of the findings.

Overview of survey findings

12. The findings from the survey are summarised in this report. This overview of findings should be read alongside the Data overview (Annex 1), Examples of Learner, whānau and teacher voice (Annex 2) and Vignettes (Annex 3). While not a formal evaluation of the fund, these findings can inform planning and support for learners and the sector, and future decision-making.

Who responded to the survey?

13. The early learning sector is well represented in the survey data, relative to the number of institutions that were allocated URF funding during the period. Institutions with a low decile/EQI rating are also proportionately represented.
14. Only a very small number of Māori medium institutions (including nga kōhanga reo)⁵ responded to the survey, resulting in a very small sample size. While roughly equivalent to the proportion of Māori medium institutions that were sent the survey, (and slightly less than the proportion of Māori medium institutions funded by the URF overall) we cannot presume the findings reflect the experiences of Māori medium. The survey was not provided in te reo Māori and regional feedback suggests the survey was not well suited to a te ao Māori approach. We therefore need to use more tailored or localised approaches to understand the URF in Māori medium settings.

⁴ Surveys were sent to the named contact who originally applied for the funding and could be a kaiako | teacher, tumuaki | principal or member of pastoral care staff. Respondents attested to having authority from the tumuaki | principal or early learning equivalent.

⁵ A Māori medium school is a school where all students are recorded as enrolled in Māori medium education as per <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/directories/maori-medium-schools>. Kōhanga reo are those which are listed with an institution type of kōhanga reo.

Key findings

Implementation is progressing for the majority of institutions in receipt of URF funding.

15. The majority of respondents stated that implementation of their URF funded support was underway, and a number had completed implementation. Very few respondents had not started implementing the support at the time of the survey. Early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo were no more likely to have started than schools and kura. Those that had not started were much more likely to have experienced challenges than those who had.

Only half of the funds provided have been spent and less than half of the learners intended have been supported.

16. Despite the progress being made with implementation, only half of the funding allocated up to the start of Term 4 had been spent at the time of the survey. Just over a quarter of the respondents had spent all the funding provided.
17. The number of learners that had received support at the time of the survey is less than half the number intended to be supported (based on application data). The reasons for this are not clear but could be related to the timing of the survey and the amount of funding still unspent. The challenges identified by respondents through the survey do not explain this finding. For example, only 7% of respondents identified challenges related to whānau and student engagement issues, suggesting this is not the cause. We will explore this finding further through the regional advisory groups to ensure no unnecessary barriers are holding back implementation.

Improvements in the regular attendance of learners supported can be seen when compared with pre-lockdown and post-lockdown.

18. Overall, schools and kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo had higher levels of regular attendance for learners supported by the URF at the time of the survey compared to both prior to the first COVID-19 lockdown ('pre-lockdown') and after the first COVID-19 lockdown but prior to the support being provided ('post-lockdown').
19. While these findings should be viewed within the context of national attendance patterns post COVID-19 and we cannot attribute causation of the increases in attendance for this group of learners to the URF, the attendance data provided by survey respondents aligns to the shifts in attendance we are aiming to see from the fund.

There have been observable improvements in the re-engagement with learning, wellbeing and cultural wellbeing of learners supported.

20. The vast majority of respondents agreed that learners supported by the funding show improved re-engagement with learning and wellbeing. This was felt more strongly by early learning respondents than those from schools and kura.
21. While respondents agreed that, for over two thirds of applications, learners supported by the funding show improved cultural wellbeing, there were higher proportions of respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed with this (when compared with improvements related to re-engagement with learning and wellbeing). To support equitable outcomes for Māori and Pacific students, we may want to consider how

cultural wellbeing is built into all URF support funded and not just those with a cultural wellbeing focus.

Ākonga Māori have not been supported by the URF to the degree we would want or expect.

22. The findings show that the URF funding distributed in Term 3 2020 is not reaching ākonga Māori to the degree we would expect, particularly in the early learning sector. Despite the efforts of regional advisory groups to prioritise funding, the total number of ākonga Māori supported by the URF as a proportion of all learners supported is the same, or (for early learning services) lower, than the total number of ākonga Māori as a proportion of the total roll. For survey respondents, it is not possible to say how far this differs from their intentions at application⁶, or what other factors may be contributing to this.
23. The findings for Pacific learners are better, with Pacific learners supported by the URF as a proportion of all learners supported greater than the total number of Pacific learners as a proportion of the roll.
24. The findings are a snapshot and do not necessarily represent the full distribution of the URF to date. However, given what we know about the specific considerations for Māori and Pacific learners as a result of the impact of COVID-19, ensuring equitable access is necessary in achieving the desired outcomes of the fund as well as honouring of our Treaty of Waitangi commitments.
25. We will explore this finding further for all funded applications to date through application data. We will also engage with the regional advisory groups to ensure that URF support is addressing the needs of Māori and Pacific learners from the application stage through to implementation.

Funding has been commonly used to fund teachers and teacher aides.

26. Two thirds of applications for schools and kura and three fifths of applications from early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo used the URF funding for additional teacher time/backfill for teaching roles and/or teacher aides. Given this, it is unsurprising that the most common challenge identified in implementing the URF was finding a suitable member of staff to provide the support. It is not clear what proportion of the funding was used in this way, or how respondents chose to organise staffing to provide the URF support⁷.

There have been challenges in implementing the URF for some, and challenges have been more likely for schools and kura.

27. Almost half of schools and kura and just over a quarter of early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo experienced one of more challenges in implementing the URF. Finding a suitable member of staff and finding time to organise the support were the most common challenges for both groups.

⁶ The number of Māori and Pacific learners directly supported by each application was not added to the application form until the middle of September 2020, meaning we have limited data on this for survey respondents. During the initial stages of implementation the priority was to make the URF application process as quick and streamlined as possible for applicants.

⁷ Directors of Education worked with regional advisory groups to ensure URF funding did not cover need that was eligible for ORS COVID-19 Response Funding and other COVID response funds, as these funds came on stream through Term 3.

The majority of respondents feel they have or will likely achieve their intended outcomes.

28. For applications where implementation was underway, almost nine in ten respondents agreed they have or will likely achieve the outcomes they set out to achieve with the funding. Early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo agreed they have or will likely achieve the outcomes more strongly than schools and kura.
29. Many respondents also experienced unexpected outcomes, most of which they considered to be positive, for example, improved relationships across learners, teachers and whānau. A small number of respondents described more mixed unexpected outcomes, for example the support unearthing existing wellbeing issues with learners that a school needed to respond to.

Next Steps

30. Earlier this month we shared, in confidence, data overviews by region with regional advisory groups through Directors of Education. We will continue to engage with regional advisory groups on the survey findings, with a view to informing decision making for the remaining 30% of the fund⁸. Ensuring equitable access to support for priority learners, in particular ākonga Māori is a priority for this work.
31. To ensure the URF has the reach intended, we will engage with funding recipients through our regional offices to understand and address any challenges. In particular, we will focus on Māori medium, barriers to reaching ākonga Maori, the number of learners stated in the application and the ability of recipients to spend the funding provided.
32. We intend to undertake further evaluative activity with schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo that received URF funding, after completion of the fund. This will include specific consideration of Māori medium, as well as priority learners.
33. In the design and delivery of the Budget 2020 COVID-19 Response Funds, the Ministry has taken a range of approaches to sector involvement and decision making. We want to learn from this experience to ensure we continue effective approaches and make ongoing improvements in how we work in partnership with the sector. We are currently exploring options for a URF process evaluation to meet this need.

Proactive release

34. 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.

⁸ Thirty percent is the national figure at 17 February 2021. There are regional variations in the proportion remaining.

Annexes

- Annex 1: COVID-19 Urgent Response Fund | Interim Outcome Survey – Data Overview
Annex 2: COVID-19 Urgent Response Fund | Interim Outcome Survey – Examples of Learner, whānau and teacher voice
Annex 3: Success and challenges in improving attendance using the URF (Vignettes)

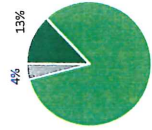
COVID-19 URGENT RESPONSE FUND | Interim Outcome Survey – Data Overview

The Interim Outcomes Survey was sent to 1,081 schools, kura and early learning services me ngā kohanga reo that received URF funding before the start of Term 4. The survey was conducted between 18 November and 11 December 2020.

Notes about responses and respondents are contained at the bottom left of the page.

Progress by institution type	Institutions	Responses	Applications	Value of applications
Started (in progress or completed)	616	628	736	\$7,754,840
Schools and kura	551	563	665	\$7,349,131
Early learning services me ngā kohanga reo	65	65	71	\$405,709
Not started (not included in data overview)	27	27	27	\$330,824
Schools and kura	24	24	24	\$203,324
Early learning services me ngā kohanga reo	3	3	3	\$27,500
Total	638*	655	763	\$8,085,664

* Total institutions does not equal the sum of the subtotals as four schools are shown in both progress categories, due to separate responses on different applications



At the time of the survey, 96% of respondents were in progress or had completed implementing their URF support.

Leamers supported

Responses indicate that funding was used to support 38,345 ākonga – 5% of these are enrolled at an early learning service me ngā kohanga reo. Of the total learners, 32% are identified as Māori and 13% are identified as Pacific. 19% of learners supported are identified as having existing learning support needs. *Note - More than one category can apply. Invalid responses have been removed.*

Spend to date

Responses indicate that a total of \$3,713,660 of URF funding had been spent at the time of the survey. This is 49% of the funding allocated; 49% (\$3.5m) for schools and kura and 57% (\$0.2m) for early learning services me ngā kohanga reo. *Note - Invalid responses have been removed.*



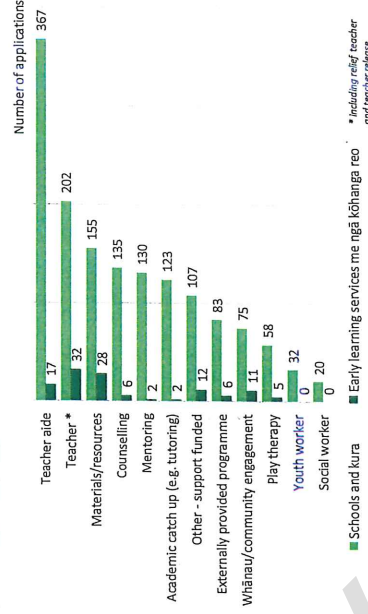
Notes about responses and respondents:

- Surveys were sent to the named URF contact person listed on the application for responses.
- Respondents attested to having authority to respond on behalf of the Principals/teachers of the institution(s) which received the funding. On the equivalent senior position for early learning services.
- Survey responses were sent to the named URF contact person listed on the application for responses.
- At the time of the survey, responses were sent to the named URF contact person listed on the application for responses.
- If an institution had two funded applications with different URF contact details, each contact was sent a survey and asked to respond about the application they were linked to. For this reason, the total number of responses is greater than the number of institutions.
- Respondents who were in progress or had completed implementation were asked about each funded application they were named as the contact for. For this reason, the total number of applications is greater than the number of responses.

Notes about attendance data:

- For schools and kura, regular attendance is attendance of greater than 50% of the time. For early learning services me ngā kohanga reo, regular attendance is attendance greater than 50% of 'normal' attendance.
- Responses were given discretion as to the exact time period used for data on regular attendance pre-lockdown, post-lockdown and current. Different time periods may have been used.
- Proportions are calculated using the number of learners attending regularly divided by the number of learners supported by the fund for each application. The average is a mean, weighted to the number of learners in the sample size.

Type of support funded



* Including relief teacher and teacher release

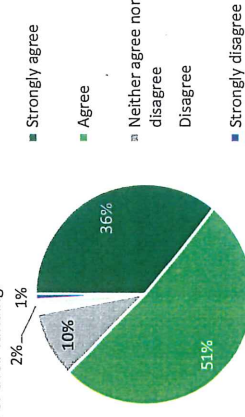
Respondents were asked to identify the different types of support funded for each application (more than one option could be selected).

Responses indicate that 55% of applications made by schools and kura were used to fund teacher aides.

For applications made by early learning services me ngā kohanga reo, 45% were used to fund teachers (including relief teachers and teacher release time).

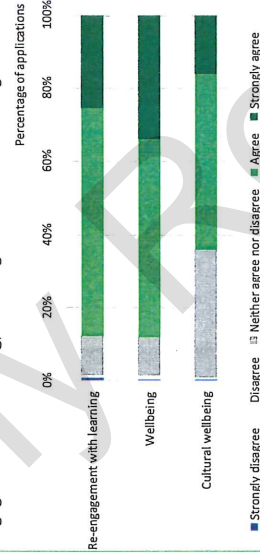
Expected outcomes

For 87% of applications, respondents told us that their organisation has achieved, or is confident that they will achieve, the expected outcomes of their funding.



Re-engagement with learning and wellbeing

For the majority of applications, respondents told us they agree or strongly agree that learners supported show improved re-engagement with learning, wellbeing and cultural wellbeing.



Attendance

Respondents were asked how many of the learners supported by the URF were attending 'regularly' at three points in time: prior to the first COVID-19 lockdown; after the first COVID-19 lockdown but prior to the support being provided; and currently. *Notes about attendance data are contained at the bottom left of the page. Invalid responses have been removed.*

Responses indicate that after lockdown, these learners had, on average, lower proportions of 'regular' attendance than prior to lockdown.

While the majority of respondents are still implementing URF support, at the time of the survey responses indicate improvements in the 'regular' attendance of learners supported.

Average proportion of learners attending 'regularly' by institution type	Prior to lockdown	After lockdown but prior to support	Current
Schools and kura	61%	57%	68%
Early learning service me ngā kohanga reo	87%	79%	92%

COVID-19 URGENT RESPONSE FUND | Interim Outcomes Survey – Learner, whānau and teacher voice

Ākonga | Learner

"I like talking to the [counsellors], she gives me ideas to deal with stuff"

- Primary school student whose school used URF to access counselling for students at-risk of disengaging.

"We have really enjoyed our time with [the teacher aide] she is a good listener and is like a big sister. [She] plays games with us and we talk while we are playing."

- Primary school student whose school used URF funding for additional teacher aides to support positive behaviour.

"[The teacher aide] helps me with my learning and helps me to understand my maths. When I ask her a question she spends time to explain what I need to know. When I'm worried I know that I can go to her and she will listen."

- Intermediate school student whose school used URF funding to employ a teacher aide to provide targeted support for students who are at-risk of disengaging.

"I was lost and full of anxiety over the lockdown and having the opportunity to talk about it made me realise I can achieve NCEA this year."

- Secondary school student whose school used URF funding to fund a counsellor to provide additional pastoral care.

Kaiako | Teachers and Tumuaaki | Principals

"The [resources] are amazing - even I feel so much calmer..."

- Early childhood teacher whose early learning centre used URF to access new resources for their kaiako and parents to support social and emotional development of their tamariki.

"The students that had missed their regular transition to school process appeared anxious and unsettled however with the URF project the targeted and focussed relationship building with whānau and new students now appears to have provided them with a 'better than ever' transition to school."

- Primary school teacher whose school used URF funding on a wellbeing programme to support transitions.

"I was really worried about the achievement of the children in my class. They were not on target to meet expected levels. Now they are"

- Primary school teacher whose school used URF to implement an academic catch-up initiative for all students.

"The presence of another teacher in the supported learning tutorial space made a significant difference to the engagement and achievement of students using the space... this strong relationship and extra access to support and expertise in a flexible, responsive space has helped many at-risk students"

- Secondary school teacher whose school used URF funding to create a supported learning tutorial space which is being co-led by teachers within the school.

NOTE: The Interim Outcomes Survey was sent to the named URF contact person listed on the application for response. The examples in this annex were extracted from question 25 of the Survey which asks respondents to provide examples of learner, whānau or teacher voice. Respondents indicated that these were the verbal and/or written feedback received from learners, whānau, teachers and staff about the impact of the URF.

Whānau | Parents and family

"I am feeling more confident in bringing my child back to the centre, seeing they have space to be themselves and learn about their emotion."

- Parent whose early learning centre used URF funding to implement an initiative to engage with whānau in their community, and to promote a safe space for tamariki to be in.

"Thank you for your genuine and authentic compassion for our wellbeing, sense of belonging and everyday needs for my child. [My child] has come out of her shell more, and has found her voice."

- Parents whose early learning centre used URF funding to implement a wellbeing initiative.

"My kid is so much more relaxed now. The techniques you have given them allow them to go to sleep much easier. Getting them to bed has become less of a challenge."

- Parent whose primary school used URF funding to implement a wellbeing therapy programme for students who are anxious and are having difficulty in engaging with their learning.

"I appreciate the counsellor's support of my child and her anxiety. It is much easier to get her to school now. The counsellor really understood my child and his encouragement has made a difference to his attendance."

- Parent whose secondary school used URF funding to employ a counsellor to lead whānau engagement within their school community and to provide additional pastoral care.

Other school staff

"Children were [excited] when teachers called round to their homes with homework and activities to do at home with parents. Some wanted to go with teachers at the time."

- Community facilitator for a group of early learning centres who used URF funding to implement a community engagement initiative to help whānau and tamariki feel safe, involved and engaged in early learning.

"Students have gained confidence in their ability to problem solve. They stop and think now. They have a more positive attitude to maths... Others are showing a better attitude and want to learn"

- Group teacher for a primary school implementing targeted academic catchups for students.

"Tamariki are eager to work with teachers, are interested in their own progress, look for challenges, feel valued and happy."

- Teacher aide for a primary school implementing an initiative to raise confidence in learning and whanaungatanga.

"The extra help was very much needed and appreciated. We were snowed under upon the return [of our students] to school."

- School counsellor whose school used URF funding to help students access additional counselling support externally.

Annex 3: Success and challenges in improving attendance using the URF (Vignettes)

The following vignettes provide examples of the success and challenges that some schools, kura and early learning service me ngā kōhanga reo have experienced when using the URF. They were gathered from the responses received through the survey with Ministry regional staff input.

Success: Early learning services me ngā kōhanga reo

Parents and whānau of an education and care service have been anxious in bringing their tamariki to the service because of fears of contracting COVID-19, especially post-lockdown. This anxiety has meant that some tamariki had a long period away from the service, impacting negatively on their attendance and engagement in learning.

The education and care service wanted to increase re-engagement in learning and has used URF support to fund resources and teacher release time to implement a whole of service initiative. This initiative has allowed the service to develop specialised support packs for whānau to keep 13 tamariki engaged and learning while at home. Kaiako were also able to go on home visits to ensure a smooth transition back to the service.

At the time of the survey, a respondent from the service told us that they are still in progress in implementing support but strongly agree that they will achieve their expected outcomes from the initiative.

The respondent also told us that the proportion of learners supported by the URF who were attending regularly was at 100% pre-lockdown, decreasing to 15% post-lockdown and increasing to 100% at the time of the survey.

While the service has faced challenges in engaging with some whānau about their initiative, the respondent told us the service has received positive feedback from some parents. An example of parent voice provided by the respondent in the survey is included below:

"Thank you so much, this home pack has kept [my child] learning instead of veg'ing in front of the telly".

Success: Schools and kura - Primary learning

A primary school was seeing a decrease in the number of students attending regularly after the first COVID-19 lockdown. It is seeing parents and whānau being anxious of contracting COVID-19 and having difficulty getting their tamariki to school because of socioeconomic issues. The school has also seen a number of pastoral care staff, who are key in supporting student attendance and engagement, resign because of sickness.

The school wanted to respond to the needs of its learners related to wellbeing to support attendance and have used URF support to fund relief teachers and teacher release time to implement a whole of school initiative. The initiative has allowed pastoral care staff, including a social worker, to go on home visits to ensure consistency and stability for 58 ākonga between home and school. The initiative has also allowed whānau to access supports and resources to promote wellbeing and academic achievement.

At the time of the survey, a respondent from the school told us that they are still in progress in implementing support but agree that they will achieve their expected outcomes from the initiative.

The respondent also told us that the proportion of learners supported by the URF who were attending regularly was at 84% pre-lockdown. The respondent then told us that this has decreased to 0% post-lockdown but has increased to 78% at the time of the survey.

Annex 3

The respondent also told us that through implementing the support, the school has been able to implement and update their own learning support register to accurately record the learning needs that students may have.

Success: Schools and kura - Secondary learning

A secondary school was seeing a decrease in the number of students attending regularly. They were seeing academic achievement and motivation negatively impacted for a number of students, and student behaviour being compounded by the first COVID-19 lockdown. This had a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of ākonga and kaiako.

The school wanted to respond to the needs of its learners related to wellbeing to support attendance and have used URF support to employ a qualified teacher to implement a group initiative. The initiative allowed the teacher to provide mentoring and academic catchups for 12 ākonga. The teacher also had a role in supporting whānau to promote wellbeing at home.

At the time of the survey, a respondent from the school told us that they are still in progress in implementing support but strongly agree that they will achieve their expected outcomes from the initiative.

The respondent also told us that, while all learners supported by the URF were attending regularly pre-lockdown, none of the twelve were attending regularly post-lockdown (before the support was implemented). The respondent told us that regular attendance for these learners had increased back to 100% at the time of the survey.

While the school has faced challenges implementing the URF support, they have been receiving positive feedback from whānau:

"Extended whānau very pleased with support given to the student and themselves. Particularly by listening to the problems and concerns from the impact of the pandemic... Parents have said the students are ready and excited about going to school and being on time."

Challenges: Schools and kura – Primary learning

A very small rural primary school with a roll of under 50 was seeing a low number of students attending regularly after the first COVID-19 lockdown. The lockdown exacerbated the existing challenges for students and had a negative impact on their social and emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. The Year 6 cohort was identified as being of particular concern as these students were transitioning to year 7 at their local area school.

The intention of the school's URF application was to fund a full time teacher aide for one term to provide focused, additional support to an identified group of 10 students with social and learning needs impacting their attendance. The school, which told us it is 'in progress' in implementing the fund, has faced challenges in implementing URF support. It has faced administrative and staffing hurdles related to finding the right person to employ for the initiative. Insights from the regional office suggest this is due to the size of the school and rural location.

The respondent from the school told us that the proportion of learners supported by the URF who were attending regularly was at 33% both pre-lockdown and post-lockdown (but before the support was implemented). This then decreased to 22% at the time of the survey, mainly linked to 2-3 families. Because of the delays in implementing support, attendance hadn't increased for this cohort at the time of the survey. Regional insights have confirmed that, since the teacher aide is in place there are some positive shifts for the identified students.

Annex 3

The survey respondent agreed that they would likely achieve their expected outcomes from the initiative. The respondent has also received positive feedback from staff on the URF support being implemented. For example, a teacher from the school told the respondent:

"Thank you. These young people needed more than what we were giving them, and with the funding we are able to give much more support".

Proactively Released