Successful learning in the early years is the first step to ensuring children remain engaged and achieving well as they progress through to tertiary education.

To achieve ‘Māori enjoying education success as Māori’, learners must have access to high-quality early childhood education and effective teaching in their first years at school. The introduction of the National Standards will help increase the focus on enhancing children’s progress in the critical areas of reading, writing and mathematics.

**What is Important in the Foundation Years?**

Attending high-quality early childhood education has positive effects that can last a lifetime. It benefits children’s literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills to at least age 16, as well as their attitudes and approaches to learning (Mitchell et al., 2008; Wylie et al., 2009b; Chamberlain, 2008).

Gaining reading, writing and mathematics foundations in the first years at school is essential for future success in education (Wylie and Hipkins, 2006). However, research on literacy and numeracy teaching in years 1 and 2 shows that the transition to school is not always managed well, and teaching is not always effective (eg, Education Review Office, 2009; Davies, 2009; Irwin and Woodward, 2005 cited in Higgins et al., 2005).

Experiencing effective teaching and learning where teachers and professional leaders are culturally responsive and have high expectations for their students and of themselves is critical. Culturally-responsive practice makes a real difference for and with diverse students, as do expectations (Bicknell and Hunter 2009; Alton-Lee, 2003; Robinson et al., 2009).

Engaging in effective learning partnerships where parents, families and whānau, and teachers are involved together in children’s learning is key. These partnerships can improve the wellbeing, behaviour and achievement of children right into adulthood (Biddulph et al., 2003; Education Review Office, 2008a&b; Robinson et al., 2009).  

**Highlights**

**Increase in early childhood education participation** — The Ministry of Education has refocused its early childhood education resources on increasing participation by groups with currently low levels of participation, including Māori.

- In 2009, 91.4% of Māori new entrants had participated in early childhood education. This is an increase from 90.4% in 2008 after a slight decline from 2007 (90.6%).
- In 2009, just under a quarter of Māori enrolments in early childhood education were in kōhanga reo. Enrolments in kōhanga reo have now stopped their decline since 2002, with 8683 in 2008 rising to 8829 in 2009.
- The proportion (52.8%) of Māori early childhood education teachers who are registered (ie, have the required qualifications) has more than doubled since 2004 (23.2%).

1. Full reference details can be found at www.educationcounts.govt.nz
The 2009 increase in the proportion of Māori new entrants who had participated in early childhood education suggests that activities such as the Counties Manukau Participation Project and Promoting Participation Project are working. In addition, the Government has allocated funding for more than 400 new places in early childhood education centres and for new capital works in Counties Manukau for 2010.

The focus on early literacy increased in 2009 with Reading Recovery funding targeted to support teachers and schools with high numbers of Māori learners, and additional literacy-focused professional development for teachers of years 1–3 in schools with high percentages of Māori and Pasifika learners. The Manurewa Literacy Project has been established as a large-scale campaign to raise literacy and education achievement in the area. This project includes Reading Together. The implementation of the National Standards in reading and writing will also increase this focus from 2010.

Participation by parents and whānau in education decision-making increased with the consultation on the National Standards and the implementation of the new curriculum documents. The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa expect schools to develop their own school curricula that are responsive to their communities. There has been a specific focus on helping English-medium schools develop culturally-responsive contexts for learning.

Challenges
While there has been some progress, there are also some key challenges ahead:

- **Early childhood education participation** – Recent early childhood education enrolment increases for Māori need to be accelerated by expanding and building on successful participation initiatives such as the Counties Manukau Participation Project and the Promoting Participation project.
- **National Standards** and **Ngā Whanaketanga Rūmaki Māori – the Māori-medium National Standards** – To improve teaching and learning it is essential that the National Standards are implemented in ways that increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning for Māori students, especially in relation to cultural responsiveness.
- **Teachers proficient in te reo Māori** – The supply of teachers proficient in te reo Māori in early childhood education and school settings is still insufficient to ensure that Māori-medium options are available for parents and whānau.
- **Literacy and numeracy** – The education success of children is dependent on gaining the necessary literacy and numeracy skills in their first two years at school. There is a need to focus resources more urgently and specifically on this in the first two years of school.

Looking Ahead
The key priorities for the next year will be:

- **increasing participation in early childhood education.**
- **improving literacy and numeracy achievement.**
- **better engagement with parents and whānau.**

Some of these actions will include:

- **evaluating the Counties Manukau Participation Project.** which is due to end by December 2010, and using the evaluation to inform the replication of the project in another area.
- **extending 20 Hours ECE** to all kōhanga reo from 1 July 2010.
- **creating more than 400 new places in early childhood education centres**, including more than $5 million for new capital works in Counties Manukau.
- **establishing 30 new places at a kōhanga reo in South Taranaki**, and providing five other kōhanga reo with grants to plan new buildings or refurbishments for over 120 children. Planning grants have also been given to projects that include supporting the development of Māori immersion centres.
- **implementing the National Standards** for years 1–8 in 2010, with the first reports to parents expected by mid-year. Boards must include National Standards targets in their 2011 charters and report against these targets in their annual reports.
- **in 2010, consulting on and trialling Ngā Whanaketanga Rūmaki Māori – the Māori-medium National Standards.**
- **evaluating the Reading Together component of the Manurewa Literacy Project, which began in March 2010, and will continue in Manurewa until the end of 2011.**