Uptake and early implementation: Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako

Monitoring and Evaluation
Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako Development Map

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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of the early implementation of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning) up to December 2016.

Highlights

**Momentum is increasing for the establishment of Communities of Learning.** Approvals and achievement challenge endorsements have accelerated during 2016. Almost two-thirds (62%) of schools eligible to access the three new roles were in Communities of Learning by the end of December 2016. At this stage, about one-fifth of schools are in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges and are in the early stages of implementation.

**Strong foundations for collective impact and productive collaboration are in place:** High levels of shared purpose and commitment, confidence about working with other members, and understanding why working together is important. Communities of Learning are confident about their capability to use data to identify achievement challenges, and to monitor and evaluate how well the actions they are taking are working. For sustainable collective impact, the active engagement of all stakeholders will be critical if Communities of Learning are to transform the education landscape and its outcomes. At this stage, Boards are participating and engaging at lower levels than other members of Communities of Learning and parent/family/whānau involvement is not yet well developed.

**Communities of Learning recognise that student achievement is a key measure of success.** However tracking and measuring change in leadership and teaching practice features less significantly in plans about what to monitor. This suggests that Communities of Learning will need support to monitor the line of sight between what they are acting on – leadership and teaching – and how this translates into tangible improvement in learners’ rates of progression and their achievement results.

**Communities of Learning are making a strong start in their implementation journey.** The picture we see so far points to the complexity of creating a system-wide change in a highly differentiated implementation environment. Implementation success depends on a constellation of local factors that make it easier for some and more difficult for others. The Ministry will need to be able to identify these communities and provide appropriate and tailored support when needed.

**Schools that do and do not belong to Communities of Learning are similar.** There do not appear to be obvious differences in the characteristics of schools that do and schools that do not belong to Communities of Learning. However, there is likely to be a complex relationship between more “objective” characteristics – numbers of members and students, scale and depth of achievement challenges, and decile composition – and less apparent attributes and qualities. For the Ministry and its sector partners supporting Communities of Learning, understanding how these features interact will be critical to ensure services and supports are responsive and targeted to what Communities of Learning need to be successful.

**Communities of Learning share a focus on common achievement challenge topics –** reading, writing, mathematics, NCEA Level 2 – but the targets that they set vary considerably in their scale, level of granularity, focus on priority learners, and ambition. Although people in the new roles are working on the same sorts of challenges, variations in the breadth, scale and scope of these challenges will mean each Community of Learning will use these roles quite differently.

**Backfilling staff is challenging for some Communities of Learning.** The degree to which this will be an issue for Communities of Learning mostly depends on the availability of the local teacher workforce.
Communities of Learning are implementing a broadly framed but not prescriptive model, working in highly localised implementation contexts. It will take time to understand the factors that shape their success and how best to support this. We know that implementation support will need to be nuanced and bespoke, and lined up to the individual characteristics of Communities of Learning in their early development. Over time, the model will evolve as early adopters share their learning, and greater clarity emerges about what elements of the model are critical for success and need to be implemented consistently alongside those that can be more flexible and locally responsive.

Background

Communities of Learning are part of the government’s $359 million Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative. The goal of IES is to raise educational achievement by lifting the quality of leadership and teaching so that best practice becomes universal. Communities of Learning provide the opportunity for significant change in the way New Zealand education is organised, functions, and works as a self-improving education system. Communities are designed to enhance teaching practice and leadership by providing opportunities for collaborative enquiry and knowledge sharing, and extending career pathways for kaiako/teachers. There are three new roles (Community Leader, Across-Community of Learning Teacher, Within School Teacher). The new roles work across and within the community to support and share effective teaching and leadership practice. Appointments to these roles are made by their respective Communities of Learning.

The process of forming a Community of Learning starts with a school or service, or a group of interested schools and services submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Ministry. A local Ministry advisor supports them to formulate an eligible Community of Learning, one that reflects the whole learning pathway from early learning to post-secondary education. The Minister of Education approves the Community of Learning, on the Ministry’s advice. After formation is approved, a Community of Learning leader can be appointed. The next stage is for members to develop a shared achievement challenge and plan, working with their wider community, families and whānau. Communities of Learning then submit their achievement challenges and action plan to the Ministry’s regional Director of Education. Once the Minister of Education endorses their achievement challenges, communities can recruit people for the new teaching roles. When appointments are complete, communities finalise a detailed plan and implementation starts. The Community of Learning monitors and reports progress, and adjusts course as required.

Uptake and characteristics

The Minister of Education approved the first 11 Communities of Learning in December 2014. Two years later, in 2016, there were 180 approved Communities of Learning. Achievement challenge endorsements have naturally tracked behind approvals as it takes time to develop these once a Community of Learning has been approved. The first Community of Learning had its achievement challenges endorsed in July 2015, and by December 2016 there were 54 communities with endorsed achievement challenges.

There is significant coverage of schools and students in Communities of Learning. By early December 2016, nearly two-thirds (62%) of the 2,409 schools that are eligible to access the three new roles were in Communities of Learning. Of those 1,500 schools, 519 (35%) were in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges. Two-thirds (66%) of eligible school students were in Communities of Learning, with over a quarter (26%) being in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges. With respect to deciles, participation does not vary by National Standards achievement results, regardless of whether schools belong to communities or not.

Early learning services’ engagement is just starting - existing Communities of Learning have relatively few early learning service members, with a small proportion (2%) of early learning services belonging to Communities of Learning in December 2016. Twenty-four communities have at least one early learning

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1 Hargreaves (2012) distinguishes between two forms of education system improvement: one that is led and directed by central government, focused on individual services and schools; and the other led by the sector to foster and embed a culture of professional learning within and between education providers to generate a self-improving system.
service. The most recent tranche of approved Communities of Learning (November 2016) included more early learning service members, indicating that this momentum is beginning to grow.

Patterns of uptake across Ministry education regions vary, reflecting the region’s size, composition, and number of schools and services. Different education regions have different proportions of Communities of Learning that are approved or have achievement challenges endorsed. For example, in the Tai Tokerau region a third (33%) of schools were in five approved Communities of Learning, of which two had endorsed achievement challenges, by December 2016. Auckland had 43 approved Communities of Learning, covering two-thirds (66%) of eligible schools, of which 19 had endorsed achievement challenges. Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast had a full complement of Communities of Learning (12), covering the large majority of eligible schools (90%) and students in the region (97%). The majority (9) of these 12 Communities of Learning had endorsed achievement challenges.

By mid-November 2016, 35 Community of Learning leaders had started in their roles in the 148 Communities of Learning that were approved at that time. Eighty across-community teachers (9% of the possible provision of these roles through IES) had started in their roles. This was similar (8%) for the within-school roles, with 352 people having started in these roles.

Most Communities of Learning have between five and eight school members. There are two Communities of Learning with 20 or more schools. There are nine Communities of Learning with fewer than five school members.

The numbers of learners Communities of Learning cover ranges from under 1,000 learners to over 8,000. Over a quarter of communities (27%) have between 1,000-2,000 learners. In contrast, smaller proportions of Communities of Learning have very small or very large numbers of learners. Twenty-four (13%) cover under 1,000 learners, and there are 18 communities (10%) with more than 5,000 learners.

**Getting established**

A number of parties contribute to the establishment of Communities of Learning and having achievement challenges endorsed. However, principals have contributed significantly more to progress than other parties involved in establishment. They have been involved in recruiting the Community of Learning leader, reaching agreement on vision and goals, establishing systems for operating as a Community of Learning and identifying some achievement challenges. In most cases Boards have had limited involvement. Parent/whānau involvement has generally not extended beyond being informed by communities about their establishment. Engagement with early learning services is still emerging.

In the establishment phase most Communities of Learning had met to agree ways of working, identified some achievement challenges, and agreed vision and goals. In terms of working with data, the majority have shared local data and many have interrogated this to identify achievement challenges.

Generally, participants’ views on the purposes of their Community of Learning are aligned with each other. They see improving student achievement, collaborative professional inquiry and improving teacher practice as the key purposes. They believe there are many shared understandings about the achievement challenges to be addressed, and feel that most schools are capable of working with data to identify these. There is less shared clarity about the actions needed to address achievement challenges. The majority of Community of Learning leaders and across-community teachers see improving student transitions as a core goal. A smaller proportion of Board members share this view.

Communities of Learning put their ability to make progress down to having a prior history of working together in a professional context, and leadership collaboration between member schools/kura and early learning services. People in key roles (e.g. Community of Learning leaders and across community teachers) report few challenges in working effectively with principals, Boards and early childhood representatives within Communities of Learning so far. Confidence and levels of trust in Communities of Learning are also reflected in their willingness to trust each other’s data and evidence and share it. Community of Learning leaders and principals are confident about working together, Boards less so.
The most common challenges Communities of Learning faced for identifying achievement challenges are using different assessment tools to measure student achievement and data not being comparable across schools/kura because of differences in how assessments are carried out.

Communities of Learning achievement challenges vary in number of challenges and number of topics. As at the end of December 2016, all endorsed achievement challenges have two or more focus areas where there is nationally collected data: National Standards (reading, writing, mathematics) and NCEA. This is likely to reflect real areas of need, but as these are focus areas that schools routinely report on achievement data for, this emphasis is to be expected. The majority of communities’ achievement challenges include targets each school needs to meet, in addition to overall cohort targets (e.g. 85% of students at or above the national standard for reading). Most communities have targets for primary and senior secondary students, but only half include targets for Years 9 and 10. This means achievement challenges do not yet cover the whole learner pathway.

**Planning, implementing and leading change**

Community of Learning members’ levels of understanding about their action plans vary. Community of Learning leaders rate their understanding of the actions, their role in achieving these, and others’ roles highly. Board members, however, have the least clear understanding of these aspects of their Community of Learning action plans.

Almost all Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges had either appointed people to the across-community teacher roles (75%), or had begun the process (21%). Many had appointed within-school teachers (50%), or had started recruitment (25%). Overall, Communities of Learning have not found making appointments difficult, but there are some challenges. The most common of these are: lack of clarity about how best to use the roles; employing part-time staff to cover teacher release; and insufficient applicants for the across-community teacher roles.

Community of Learning leaders have a complex job. They need to keep the Community of Learning moving forward - making appointments, and setting up monitoring and evaluation systems and processes. At the same time, they need to bring everyone along by keeping engagement, buy-in and commitment going across the Community of Learning.

Teachers in both roles are confident about working with others to facilitate inquiry, share their own teaching practice, and lead professional learning activities. Teachers in the new roles are focusing on literacy, culturally responsive practice, professional inquiry and numeracy. Across-community teachers are also focusing on data use, assessment, and effective practice.

**Shared measurement: Understanding progress and impact**

Communities of Learning are confident that they have the capability to monitor the effectiveness of what they are doing to improve student achievement, and align their monitoring and evaluation processes. However, the shared measurement systems and review processes fundamental for Communities of Learning to operate as effective improvement systems are still developing. Overall, although people feel that many of the schools in their Community of Learning do have monitoring and evaluation capability, a substantial proportion of endorsed communities are yet to make detailed arrangements for working with student achievement data, beyond agreeing when specific Community of Learning-wide data will be collected.

Communities of Learning are clear that student achievement is a key indicator for measuring the impact of their work. There is less clarity about how to measure and track progress on what leads to these outcomes (e.g. the signs that change is happening in teaching and leadership practice). While over a third of Communities of Learning had support in planning for monitoring and evaluation, this was the least common form of support they had received.
1 Introduction

Report scope and focus
This report is an overview of the early implementation of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning). It draws together a range of information, including:

- analysis of Ministry administrative data about Community of Learning characteristics, uptake and progress
- top-line findings from a Ministry commissioned survey of the 148 Communities of Learning in action by late 2016 (October 2016)\(^2\)
- ERO’s report on the implementation of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, based on information collected in Terms 2 and 3, 2016 from 82 schools, and 20 workshops held with Communities of Learning across the country in 2015 and 2016 (ERO, 2017b)\(^3\)
- NZCER’s 2016 National Survey of Primary and Intermediate schools and their 2015 National Survey of Secondary Schools\(^4\)
- key informant interviews in April 2016 with leaders from nine Communities of Learning from the very first communities to have achievement challenges endorsed.\(^5\)

This introduction lays out the policy background to Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, tracing their origins as part of Investing in Educational Success (IES), the rationale behind them, their intended outcomes and how they work.

The rest of the report covers:

- uptake and characteristics of Communities of Learning (section 2)
- how Communities of Learning get established and start their work (Getting started – section 3)
- how Communities of Learning are operating once they have endorsed achievement challenges (Planning, implementing and leading change – section 4)
- how Communities of Learning are setting up the systems and processes they need to track, review, and adapt what they are doing, and continuously improve teaching and leadership practice (Shared measurement: Understanding progress and impact – section 5).

Policy background
Investing in Educational Success (IES)
In late January 2014 the Prime Minister announced Government’s extra $359m investment in the education system to raise student achievement and strengthen teaching and education leadership through IES. It was designed to bring about system changes to significantly and substantially strengthen the teaching profession’s teaching practice and education leadership. It introduced new career pathways, incentives for teacher-led innovation of practice and help to get highly effective principals to the schools and kura most in need. These changes were intended to support whole of system change, building the foundations for career pathways and strong incentives for collaboration and innovation. These changes are expected to lead to measurable gains in learning and student achievement.

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\(^2\) For simplicity, this is referred to as ‘the survey’. Full details about the survey’s sample, focus and response rates are in Appendix 1.

\(^3\) ERO (2017) Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako in Action.

\(^4\) NZCER’s 2016 Survey of Primary and Intermediate Schools is referred to as ‘the 2016 NZCER survey.’ Their 2015 National Survey of Secondary Schools is referred to as ‘the 2015 NZCER survey.’

\(^5\) Details about this work are in Appendix 1.
IES is delivered through three elements.

- Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning). These bring together groups of schools, kura and early learning services to raise achievement for learners by sharing expertise, supporting each other and working together.
- Principal Recruitment Allowance (PRA). The PRA is an allowance for the most high-need state and state-integrated schools and kura to attract highly effective principals, where the principal position is vacant.
- Teacher-led Innovation Fund (TLIF). The TLIF supports quality practice that improves student achievement and can be shared and adapted for use across schools and Communities of Learning.

IES is designed to shift and lift student achievement by:

- recognising and utilising expertise across the system where it is needed most
- creating opportunities and incentives for good teachers to stay in the classroom
- encouraging collaboration across the system
- enhancing opportunities for teacher-led innovation of new and good practice, to make visible what is possible, new and exciting
- incentivising outstanding leaders to take up principal roles to make schools better, and turn around struggling schools
- creating more opportunities and two clear pathways to fuller professional career as a teacher or a principal
- a developing group of measures to record and report on the progress of the achievement challenge.

Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako

Communities of Learning began as the 'engine room' of IES and are evolving into a new way of delivering education for New Zealand learners. Based on principles of working collectively to address complex challenges, they are designed to broaden the pool of knowledge and expertise available for kaiako/teachers and principals to draw on, particularly where there is limited knowledge and experience in working effectively with learners from a particular priority group and their whānau and families.

Communities of Learning set shared goals (achievement challenges) based on information about their learners' educational needs and work together to achieve them. Communities provide opportunities for kaiako/teachers and leaders to provide support from across the learning community, to learners throughout their learning journey.

Communities of Learning are also designed to enhance teaching practice and leadership, by providing opportunities for collaborative enquiry and knowledge sharing, and extending career pathways for kaiako/teachers. Three newly established roles (Leadership role, Teacher (across-Community of Learning) role, Teacher (within school) role) are appointed by Communities of Learning to work across and within schools to support and share effective teaching and leadership practice.

These new roles are embedded in Communities of Learning which:

- represent the education pathways local students take through early learning, schooling, and on to further study and employment
- enable learners and teachers to access the collective resources available across a Community of Learning to ensure that teaching and learning meets their needs
- focus attention on shared data-driven achievement challenges so that every child and young person in a Community of Learning can be successful
- make it easier for teachers and leaders to share and grow their expertise together so that every child and young person can benefit from the best teaching

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6 The original IES policy referred to Communities of Schools (CoS). This was changed to Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako with the inclusion of early learning providers in 2016.
9 In this report people in these roles are referred to as community leaders, across-community teachers, and within-school teachers.
• create new career pathways for teachers and leaders.

**Intended outcomes**

Communities of Learning intended outcomes are to raise student achievement by improving teaching and leadership through collaborative inquiry, knowledge and capability building within and across schools and services. This will lead to a more collaborative education system, improved progress and student achievement, and increased equity of achievement and outcomes for learners. Figure 1 below describes the relationship between Community of Learning activities and intended outcomes. Table 1 outlines the key features of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako. A critical implementation step is getting the new roles in place – it is a necessary, but not sufficient, criterion for success.

**Figure 1: Simple Theory of Change for Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako**
Table 1: Key elements of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako

| New roles and allowances: the Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako bring together three new roles | Leadership role: one role per Community of Learning. The leader's role is to offer leadership in building productive collaboration within the community, facilitate the ongoing development and implementation of the achievement plan, support professional growth of leaders and kaikako/teachers, and offer leadership in the use of professional expertise across schools to meet shared achievement objectives in collaboration with other tumuaki/principals in the Community of Learning. Leaders may be appointed before achievement challenges are endorsed. This position is generally held by a Principal. It attracts a $30,000 p.a. allowance and 0.4 full time teacher equivalent (FTTE) release time. |
| --- | --- |
| Teacher (across-Community of Learning) role: These roles involve mentoring effective teaching practice and the interface across involved schools/kura/early learning services. They are appointed once the achievement challenge has been endorsed and attract a $16,000 p.a. allowance and 0.4 FTTE release time. The number of these teachers per Community of Learning is calculated on the basis of FTTE per school within the Community of Learning. Schools receive additional funds for release time. |
| Teacher (within school) role: These teachers act as mentors and advisors to share good practice within a school. The roles are appointed once the achievement challenge has been endorsed and attract an $8,000 p.a. allowance and 0.08 FTTE release time. The number of with-school teachers is calculated on the basis of FTTE per school. |
| Appointments to these roles are made by Boards of Trustees (Boards) within the Community of Learning. The New Appointments National Panel (NANP) is an independent panel of education experts who provide advice and guidance on and participate in the appointment processes of for both the Community Leader role and the Across School teacher roles. Panel members provide assurance that applicants have met the relevant national criteria for appointment to the new roles. The NANP is led and managed by a Chairperson contracted by the Ministry of Education. |
| As well as these roles, all Boards in a Community of Learning are allocated: |
| - release time to backfill appointees to roles' substantive positions while they focus on agreed Community of Learning work |
| - inquiry time to support kaikako/teachers build a strong culture of inquiry and collaboration by undertaking structured opportunities to access, observe, collaborate and reflect with kaikako/teachers across the Community of Learning and within schools. Boards receive at least 0.05 FTTE inquiry time per year where a school’s Guaranteed Minimum Formula Staffing (GMFS) or assured staffing is greater than 10 FTTE. Inquiry time is calculated by dividing a school’s staffing by 10 and multiplying by 0.06 to give an annual allocation. |
| - an annual funding allocation of $1,000 once the Minister has approved the formation of the Community of Learning or a school joins an existing one. This funding is to support schools’ participation. |
| Achievement challenges | Each Community of Learning sets its own shared achievement challenge. The achievement challenge is a set of objectives formulated in response to careful analysis of local needs. This analysis includes consideration of existing evidence (e.g. aggregated data about the Community of Learning) and consultation with learners, whanau, kaikako/teachers and the wider kura/school community. These objectives are brought together in an achievement plan. |
| Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako level monitoring and evaluation | Communities of Learning use a lateral accountability model and are responsible for monitoring their own progress, development and use of resources. The Ministry intends that each will establish its own operating structure to provide governance and oversight. |
How Communities of Learning work

A Community of Learning is a group of education and training providers (early learning, schools, kura, and post-secondary) that reflect the learner pathway from early learning services to post-secondary education. They usually have a geographical basis, and collaborate on working toward a particular student achievement goal, an achievement challenge. Communities of Learning can be built on existing networks or clusters of schools, services and training providers. Figure 2 outlines the process for forming a Community of Learning.

Figure 2: Process for forming Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako

EOI proposed community

- A school or service, or a group of interested schools and services submits an Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Ministry.

Eligible community

- A local Ministry advisor (Community of Learning Lead Advisor) supports schools/services to formulate an eligible community, reflecting the whole learning pathway that meets key criteria: a pathway from early learning services to post-secondary education; focus on student learning; viable size; and geographic proximity. The advisor also clarifies entitlement to resourcing (roles), management structure, use of Inquiry Time.

Approved community

- The Community of Learning is approved by the Minister of Education, on the Ministry's advice (approved Community of Learning).

Achievement Challenge

- Communities of Learning engage with members, including Boards of Trustees, their wider community, families and whānau to identify and create: plans to address their shared achievement challenges; the structure that will oversee the community; and how they will monitor progress. The community submits a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between all school/kura leaders and Board chairs, its achievement challenges and action plan to the Ministry's regional Director of Education.

Resources, recruitment, planning, implementation

- Once the Community of Learning achievement challenge is endorsed by the Minister of Education, the Ministry grants relevant resources - roles, inquiry time. Recruitment of people for the roles begins. When appointments are complete, the community finalises a detailed plan and the community leader coordinates this across all schools and services.Implementation starts and the community monitors and reports progress, and adjusts course as required.
In April 2016 Cabinet agreed to additional initiatives to improve progress and support Community of Learning members to work together effectively.\(^1\)

1. **Expert Partners.** These are independent critical friends to strengthen inquiry-based teaching practices (including evidence gathering, problem definition and evidence-informed action planning). Their support will help to keep Communities of Learning on track for developing robust and quality achievement challenges and associated plans that will accelerate student achievement. Expert Partners will agree on a work programme with their Community of Learning leader and will be available to support them for up to two years. From December 2016, there are 104 Expert Partners available nationwide.\(^2\)

2. **Bundled Support Packages.** These will support Communities of Learning to collectively purchase a bundle of services from providers credentialed by the Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). Communities of Learning will use existing funding currently used to purchase all the same services individually. These packages will include: business and financial services; Information and Communications Technology (ICT); and property services.

Both of these initiatives are outside the scope of this report – Expert Partners were only just available to Communities of Learning in late December 2016. Future reports will address their role and contribution to effective implementation.

**Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako Development Map**

In late 2016 the Ministry created a Development Map to help Communities of Learning understand their progress as they move from getting established through to becoming a fully functional community (see Appendix 2). It draws on ERO’s School Evaluation Indicators, the 2014 IES Working Group, and evidence about the role of collaboration in achieving better learning outcomes for children and young people. Communities can use the map to identify potential areas for development across six domains:

- Teaching collaboratively for the best learning outcome for every child
- Leading for progress and achievement for every child and every teacher
- Evidence guiding our practice and actions
- Pathways developing and connecting along the whole educational journey
- Partnering with parents, employers, iwi and the community
- Building a thriving Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako.

Each community will be at different stages of development for each of the six domains – ranging from establishing, developing, embedding, to fully functioning. The Development Map is a guide to help communities understand where they are at and where they might be heading in the future. It is not a tool for rating communities’ progress.

**Links with other programmes**

As well as linkages with other IES components, Communities of Learning are closely aligned to changes being made to centrally funded Professional Learning and Development (PLD). The [PLD website](https://www.pld.govt.nz) provides an overview of these changes.

**Further background information**

More information is available on the [Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako webpage](https://www.leadership.education.govt.nz/). This includes:

- [He Aratohu mā ngā Kura](https://services.education.govt.nz/pld/information-for-principals-and-school-leaders/leadership/expert-partners/)
- [Guide to Writing a Memorandum of Agreement](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/expert-assistance-communities-learning)
- [Role Selection and Appointment Information](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/expert-assistance-communities-learning)

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\(^{1}\) See [https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/expert-assistance-communities-learning](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/expert-assistance-communities-learning)

\(^{2}\) For more detail, see: [http://services.education.govt.nz/pld/information-for-principals-and-school-leaders/leadership/expert-partners/](http://services.education.govt.nz/pld/information-for-principals-and-school-leaders/leadership/expert-partners/)
2 Uptake and characteristics

Key findings

- Uptake is gaining momentum: approvals and achievement challenge endorsements accelerated in 2016.
- There is significant coverage of schools and students in Communities of Learning. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of eligible schools are in a Community of Learning. Early learning services’ engagement is still developing.
- Patterns of uptake vary across Ministry education regions.
- Proportions of schools and students in approved or endorsed Communities of Learning are broadly similar across deciles.
- There is no difference in uptake within deciles relative to National Standards results.
- Uptake of community of roles is tracking behind original projections.
- Most communities have 5-8 school members.
- Communities cover different numbers of learners, ranging from under 1,000 to over 8,000.

How is uptake tracking?

Approvals and achievement challenge endorsements accelerated in 2016

The graph below (Figure 3) shows how Communities of Learning uptake has tracked since late 2014. The rate of approvals accelerated during 2016, as did achievement challenge endorsements in the last quarter of 2016. After the policy announcement in January 2014, 11 Communities of Learning were approved by December 2014 and by March 2015 there were 29. This rose to 42 by August 2015, with 96 in November 2015. By midway 2016 there were 117, rising to 148 by September. Another 32 were approved in early December 2016, taking the total number of approved Communities of Learning to 180.

Achievement challenge endorsements have tracked behind approvals as it takes time to develop these after a Community of Learning has been approved. The first Community of Learning had its achievement challenges endorsed in July 2015. By November 2015, a year after the first Communities of Learning were approved, 11 had endorsed achievement challenges. A little over a year later, in December 2016, there were 54 (30% of all approved Communities of Learning).
Figure 3: Communities of Learning approvals and achievement challenge endorsements (December 2014 – December 2016)

Figure 4 below shows the proportion of Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges, by tranche. One of the first 11 Communities of Learning to be approved in December 2014 (Tranche 1) had yet to have its achievement challenges endorsed by December 2016, and three of the 18 in Tranche 2 (April 2015) had yet to do so. Of the 55 Communities of Learning approved in November 2015, 15 have endorsed achievement challenges. Overall, at the end of December 2016, 54 of the 180 approved Communities of Learning (30%) had endorsed achievement challenges.

Figure 4: Endorsed achievement challenges by tranche (December 2016)
Once formation is approved, it typically takes a Community of Learning about a year to have achievement challenges endorsed. The average time it takes for achievement challenges to be endorsed has increased over time. Of the 11 Communities of Learning approved in December 2014 it took about half of these (6, 54%) over a year to have achievement challenges endorsed. Of the 54 Communities of Learning approved in November 2015, 44 (81%) took more than a year to have achievement challenges endorsed. Figure 5 shows this trend for the first four tranches of approved Communities of Learning.

Figure 5: Time taken between approval and endorsement of achievement challenges: Tranches 1 to 4

The length of time it takes between a Community of Learning being approved and having endorsed achievement challenges varies by Ministry education region. For example, in the Tai Tokerau and Hawkes Bay/Gisborne regions, all Communities of Learning approved between December 2014 and November 2015 (Tranches 1-4) had taken more than a year to have achievement challenges endorsed. In the Auckland, Bay of Plenty/Rotorua/Taupo and Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast regions greater proportions of Communities of Learning were taking less than a year (42%, 50% and 60% respectively) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Time taken between approval and endorsement of achievement challenges: Tranches 1 to 4 by education region
How many schools, services and students are involved in Communities of Learning?

There is significant coverage of schools and students in Communities of Learning

By early December 2016, nearly two-thirds (62%) of the 2,409 schools that are eligible to access the three new roles were in Communities of Learning. Of those 1,500 schools, 519 (35%) were in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges. At that stage 180 Communities of Learning were established, and 54 (30%) of these had endorsed achievement challenges, as shown in Figure 7. Two-thirds (66%) of eligible students were in Communities of Learning, with over a quarter (27%) being in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges.

Figure 7: Community uptake and coverage: Number and percentage of students and schools (December 2016)

In the 2016 NZCER Survey of primary and intermediate schools, two-thirds of the 200 principals who responded were engaged in the process of Community of Learning formation or early Community of Learning activity in August–September 2016. About a quarter (28%) were either in discussions with other schools about forming a Community of Learning or part of a community and developing achievement challenges (23%). Small proportions were in a community with endorsed achievement challenges (12%), waiting for achievement challenges to be endorsed (11%), or in discussions about forming a Community of Learning (5%).

What does uptake look like across education regions?

Patterns of uptake vary across Ministry education regions

Patterns of uptake across Ministry education regions vary, reflecting regions’ size, composition, and number of schools. Different education regions have different proportions of Communities of Learning that are approved or have achievement challenges endorsed. For example, in the Tai Tokerau region a third (33%) of schools were in five approved Communities of Learning by December 2016. Auckland had 43 approved Communities of Learning, covering two-thirds (66%) of eligible schools, of which 18 had endorsed achievement challenges. Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast had almost a full complement of Communities of Learning (12), covering the large majority of eligible schools (90%) and students (97%) in the region. The majority (9) of these 12 Communities of Learning had endorsed achievement challenges (Figure 8).
Figure 9 shows where Communities of Learning are located nationally across the Ministry’s 10 education regions. Details of specific Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges are available on the Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako webpage.

Proportions of eligible schools in Communities of Learning vary by education region, as do the relative proportions of schools in approved or endorsed Communities of Learning. The Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast region has the greatest proportion of eligible schools in Communities of Learning, and the highest proportion of schools in endorsed Communities of Learning. By contrast in Otago/Southland about half of eligible schools are in Communities of Learning and a very small proportion are in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges. Tai Tokerau has the smallest proportion (33%) of eligible schools in Communities of Learning, but of these 48 schools, 30 are in Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges (Figure 10).
Figure 9: Location of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (December 2016)
What does coverage look like by school decile and achievement?

Proportions of schools and students in approved or endorsed Communities of Learning are broadly similar across deciles

Proportions of students that are in approved or endorsed Communities of Learning are broadly similar across deciles (Figure 11) as are the proportions of schools (Figure 12).

Figure 10: Number and percent of eligible schools in Communities of Learning by region (December 2016)

Figure 11: Number and percent of eligible students in Communities of Learning by decile (December 2016)
Does uptake relate to National Standards results?

There is no difference in uptake within deciles relative to National Standards results.

Figure 13 compares schools that are in and not in Communities of Learning by decile, relative to National Standards results. There appear to be no differences in whether schools within deciles belong to a Community of Learning or not, relative to their National standards results. Low decile schools, whether in a Community of Learning or not, currently show larger proportions of students achieving below or well below the National Standards relative to the proportions of students in these achievement groupings in high decile schools. The picture is similar for Māori and Pasifika students, Figures 14 and 15.

Figure 13: Number and percent of all students by Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs), school decile and school Community of Learning status
Figure 14: Number and percent of Māori by Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs), school decile and school Community of Learning status.

Based on aggregated 2015 National Standards data across mathematics, reading and writing.

Figure 15: Number and percent of Pasifika by Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs), school decile and school Community of Learning status.

Based on aggregated 2015 National Standards data across mathematics, reading and writing.
How is progress with appointments going?

Role uptake is tracking behind original projections

By mid-November 2016, 35 Community of Learning leaders had started in their roles in the 148 Communities of Learning that were approved at that time. Eighty across-community teachers (9% of the possible provision of these roles through IES) had started in their roles. This was similar (8%) for the within-school roles, with 352 people having started in these roles.

After July 2016 Communities of Learning were able to appoint to the Community of Learning leader role before achievement challenges were endorsed, if they chose to do so. Before then community leaders could only be appointed after achievement challenges were endorsed. This change was intended to help communities develop their achievement challenges and help reduce the length of time it was taking for them to move from being approved to being endorsed, and having access to the three new roles. At this stage, it is still too early to see whether this has influenced how long it takes to develop achievement challenges, and what impact this has on the uptake of the two teaching roles.

Table 2 below shows the uptake of the three roles, compared to the total number or roles available through IES and the original projections about uptake from 2014.

Table 2: Progress with role appointments (mid-November 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Uptake (mid-November 2016)</th>
<th>Roles available for appointment through approved communities</th>
<th>Original uptake projected in 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>December 2015 December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community leaders</td>
<td>35 started*</td>
<td>149**</td>
<td>69 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14% of total 250 available through IES)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across-community teachers</td>
<td>80 started*</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>192 432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9% of total 860 available through IES)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within-school teachers</td>
<td>352 started*</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>802 2,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8% of total 4,500 available through IES)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on payroll records, more may have been appointed but not yet started.
** In mid-November 2016, 148 communities were approved so 148 roles were available. As one Community of Learning has two leaders, where two Communities of Learning are working as one, this makes the total 149.

ERO notes that making appointments to the teacher roles and backfilling staff can take up to six months once achievement challenges are endorsed, slowing implementation (ERO, 2017b:18). Ensuring role descriptions are well defined and agreeing ways of working provides a strong platform for Communities of Learning to implement their action plans. Some Communities of Learning are timing appointment processes so that appointees can take up their roles at the start of the new school year. This means that staffing arrangements can be set up to avoid disruptions for students and schools. Original projections assumed continuous take-up, rather than peaks and troughs of appointments lined-up to the school year.

Characteristics - What are Communities of Learning like?

Most Communities of Learning have 5-8 school members

In general, the large majority of Communities of Learning have between five and eight school members, with six being the most common Community of Learning size (29 Communities of Learning). Piritahi (2BCoS) Community of Learning in Blenheim has 21 schools, and Far North Community of Learning has 20 schools. There are nine communities with fewer than five members. Figure 16 shows the distribution of Communities of Learning by the number of member schools.
Communities of Learning cover different numbers of learners, ranging from under 1,000 to over 8,000.

Another dimension of Community of Learning size is the number of learners they cover. The two largest categories combined (27%) have between 1,000-2,000 learners. Twenty-four cover under 1,000 learners, and there are 18 (10%) with more than 5,000 learners (Figure 17).

Early learning services’ engagement is still developing.

In October 2015 the initial ‘Communities of Schools’ concept was extended to ‘Communities of Learning’ to include a focus on connecting the early learning to school pathway, and the potential for a seamless transition from one part of the education sector to the next. Existing communities have relatively few early learning service members. By December 2016 twenty-four communities had at least one early learning service, however only a small proportion (2% - 95) of early learning services belonged to communities. The November 2016 tranche of approved communities included more early learning service members, indicating that this momentum is beginning to grow.
The pathway from early learning services to schools can be difficult to define. This is easier in smaller areas but, in larger areas and cities, there are many potential services that could be part of a Community of Learning. Here parents’ movement across cities and large provincial towns usually mean children in early learning services are some distance from the school they will later attend. Without greater early learning service involvement, “currently the potential for cohesiveness and connectedness [across the learning pathway] is largely untapped” (ERO, 2017b:11).
3 Getting established

Key findings

- In approved Communities of Learning principals have been the most significant contributors to progress of all the members.
- Parent/whānau involvement has been generally limited to communities informing them about their establishment.
- Engagement with early learning services is still emerging.
- Strong foundations for collective impact and productive collaboration are in place. Levels of shared purpose and commitment within Communities of Learning are high.
- Community members’ confidence about working with data to develop achievement challenges is also high.
- Community leaders and across-community teachers have a shared focus on learner pathways (or improving student transitions) as a core goal, Boards less so.
- People in key roles are generally confident they can work effectively with principals, Boards and early childhood representatives.
- The issues communities most commonly identified for developing achievement challenges are schools/kura using different assessment tools to measure student achievement and data not being comparable because of differences in how assessments are done across schools/kura.
- The targets that Communities of Learning set vary considerably in their scale, level of granularity, focus on priority learners and ambition.
- Achievement challenge targets typically focus on reading, writing and mathematics - areas where there is nationally collected data: National Standards (Years 1-8 for reading, writing, mathematics) and NCEA (Years 11-13).
- Most communities have had support in a variety of areas, mostly from Ministry resources and staff.

Who has been involved?

Principals are the main drivers, Boards less so

In Communities of Learning working on establishing achievement challenges, principals have contributed significantly more to progress than Boards – the Ministry commissioned survey of Communities of Learning shows 80% of communities had involved principals in recruiting the community leader, reaching agreement on vision and goals, establishing systems for operating as a Community of Learning and identifying some achievement challenges. In general, a minority of community leaders have contributed to making progress in approved Communities of Learning (up to 20% for the tasks identified). This is because only a minority of approved Communities of Learning have appointed a leader (Figure 18).
ER0 too has found that “principals are generally the prime movers in initiating the establishment of a [Community of Learning] | Kāhui Ako and they are the most visible participants at community meetings” (ERO, 2017b:8). Boards have had limited involvement, except for signing the Memorandum of Agreement. The involvement of Boards is generally low on other tasks.

The degree to which boards of trustees are involved in forming communities varies. There are early formalities that require board approval, so it is critical that trustees are involved and well informed. We found evidence that most principals kept boards informed at a basic level about what is happening through their regular reporting channels. However, trustees’ understanding and involvement during the establishment phase is particularly important given their roles as signatories to the Memorandum of Agreement, their [Communities of Learning] | Kāhui Ako employment responsibilities, strategic stewardship accountabilities and the role they play as parents and Community of Learning members. (ERO, 2017b: 9)

Parent, whānau, and early childhood engagement has been limited

Parent and whānau involvement is limited so far. In approved Communities of Learning, almost three-quarters (71%) described informing them about the establishment of the community as a key task the community had done. A small proportion (18%) had been asked to support learning improvement. Engagement with early learning services is still emerging - around a third (31%) of communities working on achievement challenges had met with early childhood representatives about community membership (Figure 19).

Where a wider range of people are actively involved in developing a community, including Boards, parents, whānau, community members and teachers, this creates high levels of interaction and understanding about the aspirations and expectations for the Community of Learning (ERO, 2017b: 9). ERO notes that it is not clear at what stage teachers become aware of involvement in a Community of Learning and what this means for them. “Given that teachers play a key role in enacting the achievement challenges in their classrooms, and service it is important they are involved as near to the point of formation as possible” (ERO, 2017b: 8).
Harnessing the knowledge and perspectives students have about what and how they learn is important. Using student voice and recognising the importance of children and young people’s agency in their own learning has given some Communities of Learning insight about how they might shape their teaching and learning expectations across the learning pathway. Examples of this include using specific focus groups, student-led interviews and videos, and opinion boxes and surveys (ERO, 2017b:9).

What are forming Communities of Learning doing?

For Communities of Learning working towards having achievement challenges endorsed, most had met to agree ways of working (73%). Over a third had identified some achievement challenges (61%), and agreed vision and goals (59%). Just over a third have developed an achievement plan. A minority of these have recruited a leader (23%), sent their achievement challenges to the Ministry (21%), and asked parents to support learning improvement (18%) (Figure 19).

In terms of working with data, between a third to two thirds have: shared local data (61%); received data from ERO12 (59%); and received Public Achievement Information (PAI)13 and NCEA data from the Ministry (43%). Half (51%) have interrogated this data to identify achievement challenges.

ERO’s findings about how Communities of Learning are organising themselves show a range of different practices and some indications of what effective communities are paying most attention to in governance and management arrangements (ERO, 2017b:25-26).

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12 ERO produces reports for Communities of Learning, at their request, synthesising information from members’ ERO reviews.

13 PAI includes information about how New Zealand’s education system is progressing, at national, regional and local levels. It supports public achievement and collective action with its focus on improving transparency and promoting the effective use of information to support improvement. See https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/topics/national-education.
• Generally Community of Learning stewardship/governance structures involve an overall group/committee with representatives from each school and may include iwi representation. Membership varies between principals and board members or a mix of both.

• Some have a separate group of board members from across the Community of Learning, working alongside and with the Community of Learning leader, across-Community of Learning and within-school teachers.

• More effective operating structures involve parents, whānau, and other community stakeholders.

• Some have set up subcommittees to work on specific topics (e.g. digital learning, monitoring and evaluation or data management) or functions (e.g. appointments).

• When the Community of Learning infrastructure was working well, ERO sees well-coordinated meetings with time spent on achievement targets and improvement work. More established Communities of Learning have generally shifted from focusing on administration to implementing their action plans.

To what extent do Communities of Learning have a shared purpose and common agenda?

Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions (Kania and Kramer, 2016).

As Communities of Learning form and establish themselves, getting agreement about what they need to work on together, and creating a mutual collective purpose is an essential foundation. A core principle of models of collective impact is that a common agenda is critical for effective collaboration and joint action. ERO’s review of the evidence about effective collaboration similarly stresses the value of having a clear focus and purpose (2017b). How well are Communities of Learning doing this so far?

Broad and shared agreement about Community of Learning purpose

The survey asked respondents about what they viewed as the purposes of their Community of Learning. Almost all see improving student achievement as a core purpose, closely followed by collaborative professional inquiry and improving teacher practice. Participants were in close agreement about these. This is consistent with ERO’s findings: the most common reasons for forming a Community of Learning were raising student achievement and/or taking collective responsibility for student success. Opportunities to pool expertise, improve teaching practice and access professional learning are also strong motivators (ERO, 2017b:8).

The 2015 and 2016 NZCER national school surveys offer a perspective on schools’ understandings of purpose. The majority of secondary principals (75%) and over half (55%) primary and intermediate principals thought the purpose of Communities of Learning was more useful sharing of knowledge for teaching and learning. Over half of secondary principals (57%) and over a third (42%) of primary and intermediate principals saw the policy as enabling them to get more traction on tackling issues around student achievement (Wylie, 2016:8).

There was more awareness about Communities of Learning among primary trustees in 2016 than there was among secondary trustees in the 2015 NZCER survey (61% compared to 42% said the approach was clear to them). Almost a third (31%) of primary trustees said they did “not really” have a clear picture. Most trustees whose school was engaged in Community of Learning formation or activity said they had a clear picture of what a community was (76%). Only a small proportion (5%) of trustees thought they had no clear picture (Wylie, 2016:17).

Shared focus on learner pathways and transitions mixed

The level and degree of agreement about Communities of Learning’ other purposes are more mixed in the current survey. While the majority of Community of Learning leaders and across-community teachers view improving student transitions as a purpose of their Community of Learning (90% and 95% respectively), a smaller proportion of Board members, nearly two-thirds (60%), see this as a purpose.

NZCER’s 2015 and 2016 surveys also reveal variable expectations that there would be a community focus on transitions across the learner pathway (Wylie, 2016: 8). A larger proportion of secondary principals (65%) identified improving transition to secondary to be a focus than did primary and intermediate principals (48%). Primary and intermediate principals identified improving transitions from primary to intermediate (39%) and
from early childhood to primary (28%) as a focus. ERO find that Communities of Learning have embraced the concept of learner pathways (2017b:10). Examples in Communities of Learning discussions and documentation include: curriculum and pedagogy coherence; strengthening practice at key transition points so learners benefit from more effective transfer of data; connected teaching and learning; and continuity of well-being practices. ERO also observes that some Communities of Learning are looking at pathways beyond traditional schooling boundaries, linking to post-school opportunities and early learning services. While slower to evolve, some Communities of Learning are also seeing benefits in developing existing Vocational Pathways programmes and engaging in links with local industry and trades (ERO, 2017b:10).

Extra funding is not a primary driver

Fewer survey respondents viewed securing additional funding as the purpose of their Community of Learning, particularly across-community and within-school teachers. Most of the participants were clear about the purposes of their Community of Learning. Figure 20, below, shows the details of the responses.

**Figure 20: Views about Community of Learning purposes**

*Question: What do you view as the purposes of your Community of Learning? Tick all that apply.*

The large majority of all groups thought there were many shared understandings about the purposes of their Community of Learning. This was also the case for understandings about the specific challenges to be addressed, with community leaders and principals rating this slightly higher than others. There were fewer shared understandings about the actions that need to be taken to address the achievement challenges (Figure 21).
In the Ministry’s key informant interviews with early adopters, even early on in their development, leaders could articulate a shared common purpose for their Community of Learning, including working collaboratively with teachers to drive inquiry within schools to improve teaching and leadership capability. They were clearly focused on improving achievement of “all our learners” and providing better pathways and strong supportive transitions between schools and services. They all knew what is important for working collaboratively – trust, good communication, open sharing of data, use of inquiry process at all levels, willingness to critique each other’s views, and active buy-in to agreed decisions. However, they were less clear about how to achieve collaboration and what it would look like in practice within and across the whole Community of Learning. Several believed that for collaboration to lead to better outcomes, principals and teachers need to work out and agree what this would actually look like in their community.

**Are the foundations for effective working relationships in place?**

**Prior history, collaboration and trust are enabling joint work**

Survey participants see a prior history of working together in a professional context (65%) and leadership collaboration between member schools/kura and ECE (64%) as the most important factors to have enabled their progress. Communication (57%) and trust (55%) between these groups also ranked fairly highly. A small proportion (15%) identified trust as a barrier. Figure 22 shows whether participants rated different factors as helping or hindering their progress.

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14 See Appendix 1 for details.
ERO observes that having been part of a former active network, cluster or association of professionals is a common motivation for Communities of Learning. Most often this is where member schools have been part of a Learning Change Network, a curriculum-based cluster, a professional learning group or an improvement initiative. Where there is no history of networking, ERO finds that Communities of Learning are slower to get going (2017b:8).

Communities of Learning are investing in establishing strong foundations for collective commitment to create the important conditions for quality adult interactions as Communities of Learning mature. These shared commitments are expressed in their codes and protocols for working together, a vision, usually including a set of shared values and, for most Communities of Learning, a considered description of their strengths and challenges. Codes and protocols are important to create the relational trust needed for safe critique and challenge within Communities of Learning. These commonly refer to active listening, being transparent and open with each other, respecting the contributions of members, having trust and integrity in interactions and being willing to share knowledge and expertise to maximise outcomes for students and teachers (ERO, 2017b:10).

Working together hasn’t been challenging so far

Despite the expectation that relational trust takes time to build, in general, the survey results show people in key roles have not found it challenging to work effectively with principals, Boards and early childhood representatives within Communities of Learning so far. This may be a reflection that many Communities of Learning identified their prior history of working together as an enabler. Leaders and across-community teachers generally find it more challenging to work effectively with others, likely because they spend more time working with others across Communities of Learning, than people in other roles such as principals. In particular, they find it more challenging to work with people from schools other than their own (Figure 23).
Confidence and levels of trust are also reflected in survey participants’ views that within their Community of Learning ‘many’ schools/kura are willing to share data and evidence, and are willing to trust each other’s data (Figure 26). Few (7%) identified reluctance to share data as a challenge to identifying achievement challenges (Figure 26).

Community leaders and principals are confident about working together, Boards less so

Community leaders feel more confident than principals to work effectively with others within the Community of Learning, particularly to establish strong links with schools/kura through the principals. In general, Boards are not feeling very confident to work with others in the community. They feel more confident to ensure their achievement targets are in line with the communities’ achievement challenges than to oversee staff in key roles, or support these staff to carry out their functions effectively (Figure 24). This has important implications for how well people in key Community of Learning roles are able to do the work to achieve the community’s goals.
NZCER’s 2016 survey shows a similar picture. For principals in Communities of Learning (45), the majority (82%) either agreed or strongly agreed that a good level of trust existed between members, and over three quarters (78%) agreed or strongly agreed that all the schools in their Community of Learning were committed to working together collectively.

How do Communities of Learning find developing achievement challenges?

High confidence in working with data to develop achievement challenges

Community leaders and representatives of approved Communities of Learning are broadly confident that most schools/kura in their community are capable of working with data to identify achievement challenges. Generally, schools/kura are willing to share data and evidence. Endorsed Communities of Learning feel slightly more capable than do approved Communities of Learning in most areas, likely reflecting their later stage of development (Figure 25).
Common measurement is challenging

To date, Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges have found it more challenging to identify achievement challenges than have approved Communities of Learning. The two most common challenges they experience are schools’/kura use of different assessment tools to measure student achievement, and data not being comparable across schools/kura because of differences in how assessments are carried out. The majority of these Communities of Learning have encountered these challenges.

ERO finds that without a strong history of collaboration or clear data literacy leadership in the Community of Learning, working through data interrogation and analysis processes to agree achievement challenges can take considerable time – in some instances, up to 18 months. They attribute this to needing to have sufficient relational trust to work transparently with each other’s data, and early support to develop the skills to work with large data sets (ERO, 2017b:15).

Differences between the approved and endorsed Communities of Learning may reflect how far they are into implementation. For example, about one fifth (22%) of Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges have had trouble in extracting data from SMS\textsuperscript{15}, while this was the case for very few (3%) of approved Communities of Learning. It is likely that many of these Communities of Learning have not yet tried to extract data from their SMS, so not experienced this (Figure 26). How challenging approved Communities of Learning found it to use achievement data to identify achievement challenges reflects this - the average response from these Communities of Learning sat on moderately challenging, while the average response from Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges sat just above slightly challenging.

\textsuperscript{15} SMS – School Management Systems.
Principals, senior staff and occasionally teachers are most closely involved in the collaborative activities of data analysis and internal evaluation. ERO also notes that boards’ involvement varies considerably. School principals are more likely to keep Boards informed, rather than Boards being involved fully in the process. ERO notes that sometimes the board chair or a delegated trustee will attend achievement challenges discussions, usually after initial analysis by principals or a delegated sub-group of educators. In a few effective cases, the board, parents and Community of Learning representatives discuss proposed achievement challenges together, before these are submitted to be endorsed.

Because the schools within Communities of Learning have a direct role in acting on achievement challenges, successful implementation depends on Boards’ engagement. As Communities of Learning rely on strategic oversight from Boards about how well member schools are contributing to the Community of Learning plan to raise student achievement, Boards need to be clear about their accountabilities for stewarding change within member schools (ERO, 2017b:16).

As ERO point out, there is scope for early learning services to play a greater role in developing achievement challenges. As most of these focus on literacy and numeracy, evidence about what children entering school bring with them and better understanding of the early learning curriculum would be valuable (ERO, 2017b:16).

**Understanding about what drives achievement challenges and how to respond varies**

Communities of Learning views about the level of shared understandings about the underlying factors contributing to achievement challenges and the actions that need to be taken to address these varied, ranging between “many shared understandings” to “some shared understandings.” Representatives from approved Communities of Learning are least clear about actions that need to be taken, understandably reflecting their earlier stage of establishment.

ERO has found that where Communities of Learning used their initial resources to hire an external facilitator or expert, or had support from Ministry personnel, such as Student Achievement Function practitioners (SAF), they had a deeper understanding of what sits behind their agreed challenges (ERO, 2017b:16).
What are achievement challenges like?

After a Community of Learning is approved, members work together to set shared targets (achievement challenges) based on their identification of learners’ needs. The community submits a high level plan outlining the targets that it will focus on to the Ministry to be endorsed by the Minister. There is no template or formal requirement for these plans. Once the achievement challenges are endorsed, the majority of the funds and entitlements can be released to the community.

Ideally, achievement challenge targets are focused, measurable and realistic – neither too big nor too small. They should be based on evidence, focus on positive change, and be easily understood and relevant to the members of the community. Achievement challenges should identify priority learners within the community (those who are not reaching their full potential) and have a clear rationale and plan of action for how the community plans to address the challenges. Achievement challenges should authentically reflect the communities’ shared vision and demonstrate collaboration. There is no expectation that they should align with Better Public Services (BPS) targets for education by including targets for reading, writing, mathematics, or NCEA Level 2.

Achievement challenges vary in number and number of topics

The guidance for Communities of Learning recommends having three to five targets set through their achievement challenges. At the end of December 2016, there were 54 communities with endorsed achievement challenges. These communities had between two to 15 targets in their achievement challenges (see Figure 28), and most had chosen to focus on three to five topics (see Figures 27 and 28). Writing/Tuhituhi was the most common topic with 52 out of 54 Communities setting at least one target related to the number or proportion of students ‘at or above’ National standards for Writing/Tuhituhi. At the Senior secondary level, communities were more likely to focus on NCEA Level 2 or NCEA level 3/University Entrance, with only one community setting a target around NCEA Level 1. Table 3 shows the frequency of topics across all 54 achievement challenges.

Figure 27: Number of targets (based on 54 communities with endorsed achievement challenges)
Endorsed achievement challenge targets typically focus on reading, writing and mathematics

Endorsed achievement challenges typically focus on areas where there is national data: reading, writing, mathematics and NCEA. This is likely to reflect real areas of need, but because these are the areas where schools have achievement data, this emphasis is to be expected. In some cases national data and supplementary local data has led to achievement challenges in other curriculum areas such as science. Writing/Tuhituhi was the most common, followed by Mathematics/Pāngarau, and Reading/Pānui. Table 3 shows the frequency of achievement challenge topics.

Table 3: Frequency of achievement challenge topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total count of targets</th>
<th>Number of Communities of Learning with 1 or more target in this topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At or Above - Writing/Tuhituhi</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above - Mathematics/Pāngarau</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above - Reading/Pānui</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above - Other Subject</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA – Literacy/Numeracy Requirements</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA - Level 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA - Level 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA - Level 3 and/or UE</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA Endorsement - Merit or Excellence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA Endorsement - Subject</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>323</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Achievement challenges vary in scope, scale and pathway focus

As there is no prescription about how to write targets in achievement challenges, they are expressed differently by different Communities of Learning. Figure 29 compares how two different Communities of Learning frame targets in achievement challenges for writing and reading.
More recent achievement challenges identify targets that each member school needs to meet to achieve the collective achievement goal, compared to earlier achievement challenges that referred to collective cohort targets (e.g., 85% of students at or above the national standard for reading across the whole community). Achievement challenges with more specific targets show much greater acuity about which students at which year levels are at most risk of not achieving.

Most communities have targets for at both primary and senior secondary, but not all include Years 9 and 10. All 54 communities have at least one target focused on at students in primary (Years 1-8), and over 90% have challenges focused on at learners in senior secondary (Years 11-13), but only half of communities include a target at either Years 9 or 10. This reflects the lack of formal assessment information, like National Standards or NCEA at these year levels. This means achievement challenges for some Communities of Learning do not cover the whole learner pathway. Focusing on early secondary is important for communities so they are able to influence later NCEA achievement. Attention to transition points - from early learning to Year 1, Year 6 to 7 and Year 8 to 9 - is also important if achievement challenges are to reflect a focus on the learner pathway and foster coherence and collaboration between services and schools (ERO, 2017b: 14). Figure 30 below shows the proportion of communities with at least one target set at each year level.
ERO reports that community capability to identify appropriate achievement challenges is still developing (ERO, 2017b:15-16).

- Earlier forming communities found resubmitting achievement challenges frustrating when these did not meet ‘Ministry requirements.’ This may have been more a reflection of not knowing how to use data to specify an effective achievement challenge and underscores the need to build capability here.
- The quality of achievement challenges has improved with support from Ministry Community of Learning lead advisers and endorsed challenges being publicly available.
- There has been some confusion that achievement challenges have been determined by ‘narrow’ national data set when some communities would like to broaden the scope of their challenges. ERO notes that the importance of raising achievement levels in literacy and numeracy as a precursor to achieving in the broader curriculum is not clearly understood and is an area where the right support can create focus on these more high leverage challenges.
- Some communities need support to understand the difference between achievement targets and the learning conditions and pedagogy that influence these outcomes. There is evidence of some setting targets/goals to complement what they see as purely ‘academic’ targets (e.g., in individualising/personalising learning, readiness for learning, digital learning, deep learning and strengthening wellbeing conditions), rather than clearly distinguishing between contributing factors and measurable outcomes.

The magnitude of the achievement challenges that communities are tackling varies, and the level of resource they have access to in the form of the two teaching roles varies too. Because achievement challenge targets are expressed differently, it is not easy to compare their relative scale across communities. However, it is useful to consider the relationship between scale of challenge and resource with this example of two different communities – Waitakere and Auckland Central (ACCOS) (Figure 31). Both have relatively large numbers of students: 6,878 and 7,945 respectively. They have roughly the same number of member schools (11 and 12) but very different decile composition. Waitakere ranges across deciles 2-7, with five decile 3 schools. ACCOS by comparison is largely made up of decile 9 and 10 schools, spanning deciles 7-10. Entitlement to the teaching roles is roughly comparable – eight and nine across-community teacher roles, and 41 and 47 within-school teacher roles. But, though they attract similar levels of resourcing, the scale of the achievement challenges they are addressing is quite different. This means that the particular focus and deployment of people in these roles is also likely to be quite different.
Analysis of achievement challenges shows that there is no necessary relationship between the number of challenges and the number of target learners as a proportion of total learners within a Community of Learning. Over three quarters of endorsed Communities of Learning (81%) are focusing on between 5% and 30% of all their learners. Relatively few (9) are focusing on over 30% of their learners (Figure 32).

The term ‘target learners’ refers to learners identified in achievement challenge targets.

Figure 32: Proportions of target learners in Communities of Learning

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16 The term ‘target learners’ refers to learners identified in achievement challenge targets.
Taking another view of the scale of achievement challenges, nearly half (44%) of Communities of Learning have set targets for 85% of learners to reach a particular level of achievement (e.g., 85% at or above Nationals Standards, achieving NCEA Level 2). Three-quarters of achievement challenges have set target shifts of between seven and 30 percentage points. On average, the challenges’ target improvements are 19 percentage points over three years, or about six percentage points each year (Figure 33).

**Figure 33: Achievement challenge improvement targets**

What sort of support are Communities of Learning getting and from whom?

**Most Communities of Learning have had support in a variety areas, mostly from Ministry staff and resources**

Both approved and endorsed Communities of Learning have received support and resources in a variety of areas. As might be expected, endorsed communities have received more support than approved communities in almost all areas (Figure 34). The one exception is organisation and management of the community: more approved communities (78%) than endorsed ones (57%) received this type of support. The two most common areas in which approved communities have received support are organisation and management of the community (78%), and the identification of achievement challenges (76%). The most common areas for which endorsed communities have received support are data analysis and interrogation (91%), the identification of achievement challenges (83%), and the development of a plan to address the identified challenges (83%).

ERO found that Communities of Learning are positive about the support Ministry personnel and other facilitators have provided to help them work with data (ERO, 2017b:15). Compared to other types of support from the Ministry or others, Communities of Learning had not received as much for planning for monitoring and evaluation. Over a third (39%) of endorsed Communities of Learning had had this, compared to about a quarter (28%) of approved communities.

The majority of communities have had support from key Ministry resources: online and regional offices. More endorsed (35%) than approved (14%) communities have received support from National Office Ministry staff. Approximately one-third of both approved and endorsed communities have received support from external providers. Smaller proportions of approved (22%) and endorsed communities (17%) have had support from ERO (Figure 34).
Figure 34: Sources of support for Communities of Learning

Question: Where has your Community of Learning received support from? Tick all that apply.
4 Planning, implementing and leading change

Key findings

- Community of Learning leaders have a complex task: keeping momentum, while bringing everyone along.

- Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges are well down the track of making appointments into the three new roles.

- While Communities of Learning are comfortable with appointment processes, backfilling positions and lack of clarity about roles were identified as challenges.

- Teachers in both roles are feeling confident about leading/facilitating inquiry, sharing their own teaching practice, critiquing the practice of others and leading professional learning activities.

- There is a clear differentiation in what across-community and within-school teachers are doing. Modelling effective teaching practice is a core focus for those in within-school roles. Across-community teachers are focusing on effective use of data, assessment and moderation, and identifying and sharing effective teaching practice.

How well do different Community of Learning members understand their action plan?

Levels of understanding of action plans varies across Community of Learning members

Once Communities of Learning are approved, they develop achievement challenges and action plans to address these. In general, different groups of survey respondents report different levels of understanding of their action plans. Leaders have the clearest understanding and Boards the least. Principals, across-community and within-school teachers share roughly similar and high levels of understanding. All groups feel they most clearly understand the actions set out in their action plan, compared to other aspects. They are relatively less clear about the roles of others, and the organisational structures and ways of working that have been established (Figure 35).

ERO found that most Communities of Learning they had contact with that had endorsed achievement challenges had action plans underpinned by a theory of improvement or inquiry model. As Communities of Learning develop their action plans and decide how to work together best, some are using external support, and others are using internal expertise. A small number of Communities of Learning have their members together for conference day so across-community and within-school teachers can begin sharing knowledge and ideas about how to lift achievement for all students. This creates opportunities for parents, whānau and other interested stakeholders to be involved (ERO, 2017b:21).
Figure 35: Understanding of aspects of Community of Learning action plan

Question: How clearly do you understand the following aspects of your Community of Learning’s action plan?

For the survey participants in Communities of Learning who had endorsed achievement challenges, many had identified areas where they can benefit from external expertise, and begun inquiry into areas that need improvement. Just over a third (38%) have identified members with strengths to enable sharing of good practice, and developed a professional development plan (33%). Small proportions (29%) of community leaders have undertaken observation of teachers’ practice with feedback, and implemented professional development across the community to address identified needs (13%). The activity that least people had been involved in was implementing cross community professional learning to address identified needs (Figure 36).
In endorsed Communities of Learning, a variety of people contributed to making progress on professional learning and development tasks. For almost all tasks, community leaders and across-community teachers have contributed the most. They have also been most involved in identifying areas where the Community of Learning can benefit from external expertise. Within-school and across-community teachers have been most involved in observing teachers’ practice and giving/receiving feedback – over two-thirds of across-community teachers had done this, and nearly half of within-school teachers.

**How are communities working together to achieve change?**

**Community leaders have a complex task: Moving forward, while bringing everyone along**

The very first Community of Learning leaders were appointed over a year ago, in October 2015. ERO describes these leaders as likely to have been prime initiators in their Communities of Learning, possibly having had a lead role in networks they belonged to earlier. Broadly they have their colleagues’ confidence and support, developed during Communities of Learning’ establishment. Most Community of Learning leader roles have had only one applicant (ERO, 2017b:18).

The Community of Learning leader role is a leadership role new to the education sector. Viviane Robson from the Centre for Educational Leadership defines the task of effective leadership as meeting two twin goals: “progressing the educational work, while simultaneously building relationships of trust, even in situations of initial mistrust.” (2016). Communities of Learning are a new context for balancing these goals:

> Effective educational leadership is not about getting the relationships right and then tackling the difficult work challenges. It is about doing both simultaneously so that relationships are strengthened through doing the hard, collective work of improving teaching and learning. (Robinson, 2011:16)

ERO says training especially geared to meet these leaders’ needs is critical (ERO, 2017b:18). Unlike existing leadership roles in the sector, they depend on influence not positional authority for effect and demand skills in leading both change and collaborative practice. The Education Council offered leadership forums for appointees and prospective leaders during 2016.

The early adopters interviewed saw themselves as facilitators, keeping engagement, buy-in and commitment going across the Community of Learning and growing leadership. However, some were finding a tension between doing this and the challenge of taking the group forward, and maintaining the active leadership of all
the member principals. Most informants saw a distributed leadership approach as essential to the Community of Learning. All the early adopter leaders were motivated to create change by working collaboratively with principals and teachers.

**Getting people on the ground**

Almost all (92%) endorsed Communities of Learning have developed role descriptions for the key roles and at least half had appointed staff to each of these. A quarter (25%) had not begun recruitment for or appointed people to the within-school teacher roles (Figure 37). Only a fraction (4%) had not developed roles descriptions for or made appointments to the across-community teacher roles (9%).

Figure 37: Recruitment and appointments to roles in endorsed Communities of Learning

Question: Which of these actions have taken place in your Community of Learning? Tick all that apply.

![Bar graph showing recruitment and appointments to roles in endorsed Communities of Learning]

**Making appointments to the roles has not been challenging**

The majority of principals indicate they have been involved in appointing key roles (79%) and over a third (39%) of Boards say this. Community leaders report that the national criteria and appointment process have helped them clarify Community of Learning priorities and directions, especially when developing position descriptions. Members of the New Appointments National Panel (NANP)\(^\text{17}\) are providing clarity about expectations for appointments (ERO, 2017b:19).

Survey results show that appointing staff to the three new roles is not perceived as overly challenging for endorsed Communities of Learning. On average, principals and boards rate this from ‘slightly’ to below ‘moderately’ challenging, with similar levels across all three roles (Figure 38). This may reflect Communities of Learning tactical decisions about when to run recruitment processes. Regional office staff and members of the NANP have indicated that some Communities of Learning have decided to implement the teaching roles to coincide with the start of the new school year, rather than immediately after their achievement challenges have been endorsed, especially if endorsement has happened later in the school year.

\(^\text{17}\) The New Appointments National Panel (NANP) is an independent panel of education experts who provide advice and guidance on and participate in the appointment processes for both the Community Leader role and the across-community teacher roles. Panel members provide assurance that applicants have met the relevant national criteria for appointment to the new roles. The NANP is led and managed by a Chairperson contracted by the Ministry of Education.
Lack of clarity about roles and backfilling roles are key appointment challenges

The most common challenges in appointing staff to the new roles were a lack of clarity about how best to use the roles (39%), and employing part-time staff to cover teacher release (30%). Lack of clarity about how to use the new roles may reflect the newness of this way of working and clarity will grow as communities establish ways of working on the ground. The next most commonly experienced challenge was insufficient applicants for the new roles. It was more common for Communities of Learning to report that applicants for the across-community teacher positions did not meet the selection criteria (15%), than it was for them to report this of the within-school teacher (8%) or community leader (6%) positions. Only a small proportion found it challenging to reach agreement on the principals (6%) or board representatives (6%) to be included on selection and appointment panels (Figure 39).
Early adopter key informant interviews revealed that the within-school teacher role was seen as leading inquiry within schools, to be champions of teaching leadership for the achievement challenges. This was a type of role that was familiar. There was a good level of clarity about its use and function, namely to lead inquiry processes. Some of these Communities of Learning had recognised that variance in capability (e.g. inquiry-based teaching practice) of some people in these roles was a key professional learning issue to address so those teachers could do the job required. Examples of responses to this included one Community of Learning contracting an external expert to work with all their within-school teachers, including facilitating workshops about the role, data considerations, collaborative sense-making and developing action plans, collaboration across the community, and monitoring and evaluation.

In contrast, the across-community teacher role was less familiar to key informants - there was much less clarity about how best to use it. This role was seen as pivotal to the Community of Learning pathway, helping design and plan how it will work, leading and facilitating to bring it all together. These people were seen as building relational trust within and across schools, providing expertise and leadership, and supporting leadership and change.

People in teacher roles feel confident

In general, both across-community teachers and within-school teachers feel reasonably confident to work with others in the Community of Learning to lead/facilitate inquiry, share their own teaching practice, critique the practice of others and lead professional learning activities. Both across-community and within-school teachers feel more confident to share their own teaching practice than critique the teaching practice of others. Across-community teachers feel slightly more confident than within-school teachers to work with others in the Community of Learning in all areas (Figure 40). In general, people in key roles have not found it difficult to work effectively with people in the teacher roles.
Survey results were very similar for tasks that were not related to professional learning, such as strengthening the participation of parents, families and whānau, and working within the agreed structures and processes.

**Capability to achieve change in practice**

**Teaching practice may be more variable than expected**

The early adopter key informant interviews offer a window on Communities of Learning experience understanding their collective teaching capability. Variance in practice capability (inquiry based practice, assessment, use of data) was also evident between the Communities of Learning. As not all are starting at the same point, this means some may take longer than others to progress. Most of these early adopters had identified variability in teaching practice as an issue for addressing their achievement challenges. This commonly included variability in assessment practice and making Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs). This was not unexpected, and was seen as an issue the Community of Learning needed to address. Several had ideas about how the Community of Learning could improve consistency through moderation processes within and across schools.

Three of the early adopters had also discovered that inquiry-based practice was not as widely or deeply embedded across all schools as they expected. At this stage, Communities of Learning were using different approaches to respond to this:

- Three had run inquiry-based practice workshops - one specifically for the within-school teachers to equip them to provide leadership around inquiry-based practice in their schools.
- Three were doing Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) training to help with consistency of assessment, data collection and use. (One had a secondary across-community teacher doing this with primary teachers as part of their strategy to address assessment around years 9-10 and the gap in assessment between National Standards and NCEA at year 11.)

**What are teachers in the new roles doing?**

**Teacher roles focus on literacy, culturally responsive practice, professional inquiry, and numeracy**

Common areas of focus for teachers in both roles are literacy, culturally responsive practice, professional inquiry, and numeracy. Fewer are focusing on numeracy than on literacy. For example, over two thirds (69%)...
of across-community teachers are focused on literacy, compared to over half (56%) focused on numeracy. Only a small proportion of endorsed Communities of Learning are yet to identify areas of focus for within-school (6%) and across-community teachers (7%) (Figure 41).

**Figure 41: Common areas of focus for teacher roles**

*Question: What are/will be the areas of focus of the across-community/within school teacher roles in your Community of Learning? Tick all that apply.*

Across-community teachers also focus on data use, assessment, and effective practice

The quality of appointments to across-community roles, and how these roles work in practice, is vital to the success of Communities of Learning. People in these roles need to model collaborative practice and lead practice change. Communities have intentionally aligned across-community teacher roles with their challenges or, where they need expertise across the community. In some these roles are specially designed to focus on evaluation or professional practice, as well as achievement challenge focus areas (ERO, 2017b:18, 23, 26). The survey reflects this - across-community teachers have specialist expertise unique to them: effective use of data (59%), assessment and moderation (49%), and identification and sharing of effective teaching practice (62%). Some across-community teachers are investigating what is driving achievement challenges in more depth. This is clarifying what changes the community needs to make to teaching practice and providing more nuanced baseline information to track practice change (ERO, 2016: 21).

Across-community teachers need to work closely with individual principals and managers across their Community of Learning. If they are to be effective in their roles, they need principals and managers’ support. ERO notes that some across-community teachers have faced resistance from individual principals about critiquing data and practice (ERO, 2017b:19). If, from the outset, individual school leaders and managers’ commitment to the communities’ collective work is weak, and relational trust and communication across the community is poor, across-community teachers may struggle.

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18 The one area of specialist expertise unique to within-school teachers is modeling effective teaching practice (56%).
5 Shared measurement: Understanding progress and impact

Key findings

- Communities of Learning are confident that they have the capability to monitor the effectiveness of what they are doing to improve student achievement.

- Shared measurement systems and review processes are still developing: detailed arrangements for working with student achievement data are yet to be in place for a substantial proportion of endorsed communities.

- Communities are clear that student achievement is the key measure of the impact of their work.

- There is less clarity about how to measure and track progress on what leads to improved student achievement - change in teaching and leadership practice.

- Support to plan for monitoring and evaluation was the least common form of support communities had received.

Developing shared measurement systems is essential for groups who are working together to make a collective impact. Without agreement on how success will be measured, reported and reviewed, having a shared common agenda is a foundation for action, but not enough to drive meaningful change and improvement. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on key indicators across a Community of Learning ensures all their efforts stay aligned and focused. But, most importantly, it means participants can hold each to account and learn from each other’s successes and failures (Kania and Kramer, 2016). These are critical features of effective schooling improvement clusters:

[They have] agreed priorities and metrics by which they hold each other to account. They have agreed a system of peer review within the cluster that requires them to share data and involves senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers. They are committed to building a culture of ‘trust-based and shared accountability across the cluster. (Farrar, 2015:11)

Student achievement is a key indicator, others are limited

The survey asked Communities of Learning about the types of indicators they are using to monitor the effectiveness of their approach. Almost all (96%) endorsed communities reported using student achievement data as a key indicator. Use of other indicators was more limited, giving a possible insight about whether communities have thought about early indicators of change that will be evident before seeing shifts in student achievement. As might be expected, more approved Communities of Learning (36%) than endorsed ones (21%) are yet to identify indicators.

Each member organisation in a Community of Learning will have its own systems and tools for monitoring and evaluation. Where Communities of Learning have started thinking about monitoring and evaluation, they are considering how to align assessment judgments and information so that the data they use to track change and progress collectively is consistent and reliable (ERO, 2017b: 23). Early indications are that some Communities of Learning are considering trialling or are already using the PaCT19 to help do this.
Interviews with early adopters gave some indications about how Communities of Learning were thinking about measuring and monitoring their progress and impact. Most believed that it was important to measure improvement and development in teaching practice. But, at this stage these early adopters generally had not paid much attention to how they would track progress and change. About half had some ideas about how they could measure change/improvement in teaching practice. Examples included teachers’ self and peer assessment, observations and peer review of practice, and appraisal against teacher’s goals.

In general, more approved Communities of Learning than endorsed ones indicated using indicators other than student achievement data to monitor their effectiveness.\(^\text{20}\) For example, half of approved Communities of Learning (50%) and over a quarter (29%) of those with endorsed achievement challenges are using learner feedback as a measure. Small proportions of both types of Communities of Learning are using leaders or teachers’ appraisal information as an indicator (Figure 42).

**Figure 42: Indicators used to monitor effectiveness**

*Question: What indicators is your Community of Learning using to monitor the effectiveness of its approach? Tick all that apply.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Approved (%)</th>
<th>Endorsed (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement data</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures of student wellbeing and engagement</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ feedback</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have not yet identified indicators</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders’ appraisal information</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures of staff wellbeing and engagement</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ appraisal information</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Systems for working with shared student achievement data still developing**

Almost half (46%) of community leaders in endorsed Communities of Learning had been involved in implementing monitoring and evaluation cycles. Overall, Communities of Learning feel that many of their member schools/kura have the monitoring and evaluation capability to: design a monitoring and evaluation plan; use data to monitor the effectiveness of actions to improve student achievement; and ensure coherence between school/kura and Community of Learning-wide monitoring and evaluation processes. Endorsed Communities of Learning rate this capability in their communities slightly lower than do approved communities (Figure 43).

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\(^{19}\) PaCT, the Progress and Consistency Tool, is an online tool that supports teachers to make judgments about students’ progress and achievement in relation to the New Zealand Curriculum National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The tool is based on Learning Progression Frameworks that break down mathematics, reading, and writing into different aspects and illustrate the steps of learning in each area. These frameworks give teachers a clearer picture of these areas of The New Zealand Curriculum and prompt teachers to consider what students know and can do across the breadth of these areas. The frameworks support moderation discussions with colleagues, by providing common tools for those discussions. See [https://pactinfo.education.govt.nz](https://pactinfo.education.govt.nz).

\(^{20}\) Of the survey participants from approved communities, over a third (31/87) indicated they had done work on monitoring and evaluation and of these 31, 22 gave details about what indicators they were or were planning to use.
While Communities of Learning express confidence in their data capability, survey findings show few had yet to set up the mechanisms to allow them to manage and use student achievement data across the collective. Many of these types of activities are new to community members and possibly belie their confidence. The majority of endorsed Communities of Learning have made some arrangements for working with this data, while the majority of approved communities (59%) have yet to do make arrangements for working with this data (Figure 44). A substantial proportion of endorsed Communities of Learning have yet to make detailed arrangements for working with student achievement data (25%).

For both approved Communities of Learning and those with endorsed achievement challenges, the most common arrangements are agreeing when specific community-wide data will be collected (27% and 67% respectively), and agreeing the format for the data files submitted to the community (23% and 46%). For both, least common was establishing systems/procedures for access to community-wide data files (5% for approved Communities of Learning and 13% for endorsed Communities of Learning).
The early adopter key informant interviews also identified these issues. Most had identified variance across the Community of Learning, and within schools, in data collection and assessment (including OTJs), understanding and use of data to inform teaching practice, student progress and reporting, and use of data monitoring systems as challenges. At this stage of their development, many of these Community of Learning leaders had little or no clarity about what the community data and monitoring issues were or how best to approach this at the community level.

Compared to other types of support from the Ministry or others, Communities of Learning had not received as much for planning for monitoring and evaluation. Over a third (39%) of endorsed Communities of Learning had had this, compared to about a quarter (28%) of approved Communities of Learning (see Figure 34, page 41).
6 Conclusion

Communities of Learning are growing momentum. Approvals and achievement challenge endorsements have accelerated during 2016. Almost two thirds (62%) of eligible schools were in Communities of Learning by the end of December 2016. The large majority (83%) of Communities of Learning that were approved before August 2105 have endorsed achievement challenges. At this stage, Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges covered about a fifth of schools and are in the early stages of implementation.

Strong foundations for collective impact and productive collaboration are in place. Levels of shared purpose and commitment within Communities of Learning are high. Working together is not seen as challenging. Community of Learning members have shared understandings about what they are trying to achieve together and why working together is important. Most communities see having a prior history of working together as a positive foundation for joint work. However, for sustainable collective impact the active engagement of all stakeholders will be critical. At this stage, Boards are participating and engaging at a lower level than hoped, are slightly less confident about working with other Community of Learning members, are less clear about the focus on the learning pathway and transitions than others, and have least clear understandings about action plans. Parent/family/whanau involvement is not well developed.

Communities of Learning are confident about their capability to use data to identify achievement challenges, although collectively sharing and using data rank highly as concerns. Using different assessment tools and differences in how assessments are carried out makes data difficult to compare across schools/kura. These are practical challenges that Communities of Learning need to overcome. Communities of Learning are similarly confident about their capability to monitor and evaluate how well the actions they are taking are working. But the practical arrangements for managing, using and interpreting data are only partly developed, and while student achievement is recognised as a key measure of success, attention to tracking and measuring change in leadership and teaching practice features less significantly in plans about what to monitor. This suggests that Communities of Learning will need support to see the line of sight between what they are acting on – leadership and teaching – and how this translates into tangible improvement in learners’ rates of progression and achievement results. Of all the support that Communities of Learning identified they received, support in planning for monitoring and evaluation was least common. Now that Expert Partners are available, Communities of Learning will have more support to grow their evaluative capability.

Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges are well down the track of making appointments into the three new roles and deploying these people. The work of teachers in the new roles is well aligned to achievement challenges. What they are doing matches their specific roles, with a clear differentiation between what across-community and within-school teachers are doing. Modelling effective teaching practice is a core focus for those in within-school roles. Across-community teachers are focusing on effective use of data, assessment and moderation, and identification and sharing of effective teaching practice.

There are many positive indications that Communities of Learning are making a strong start in their implementation journey. But the picture we see so far also points to the complexity of creating a system-wide change in a highly differentiated implementation environment.

While there don’t appear to be obvious differences in the characteristics of schools that do and do not belong to Communities of Learning, there is likely to be a complex relationship between more “objective” characteristics – numbers of members and students, scale and depth of achievement challenges, and decile composition – and less apparent attributes and qualities. For the Ministry and its sector partners supporting Communities of Learning, understanding how these features interact will be critical to ensure services and supports are responsive and targeted to what Communities of Learning need to be successful. Making sense of what is working and how to respond with agility will be critical for Community of Learning success. This is equally essential for the agencies and experts that are supporting Communities of Learning to understand how to provide tailored services and support.
Communities of Learning share a focus on common challenge topics – reading, writing, mathematics, NCEA Level 2 – but the targets that they set vary considerably in their scale, level of granularity, focus on priority learners, and ambition. Ostensibly the people in the new roles are working on the same sorts of challenges. But the variants of breadth and scope will mean each Community of Learning will use across-community and within-school teachers quite differently.

Implementation success will depend on a constellation of local factors, some which are more or less easy for Communities of Learning to influence. Communities of Learning don’t consider making appointments has been overly challenging, but backfilling staff ranks highly in their practical concerns about getting the roles into action. Depending on the local teacher workforce, this may be more or less challenging, especially for remote and rural Communities of Learning. This is another example of the highly localised implementation context that Communities of Learning are working in.

Communities of Learning are implementing a broadly framed but not prescriptive model. It will take time to understand the factors that shape their success and how best to support this. How quickly it will take for Communities of Learning to become fully operational and for positive changes for students to become evident across the system as a whole will also take time. Regional variations in pace of uptake and endorsement will mean that impacts on student achievement will be evident at different times in different regions. We know that implementation support will need to be nuanced and bespoke, lined up to the individual characteristics of Communities of Learning in their early development. Over time we would expect to see the model evolve as early adopters share their learning, and there is greater clarity about what elements of the model need to be implemented consistently, alongside those that are more flexible and localised.
Appendix 1

Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako Survey (October 2016)

The Ministry commissioned Education Technology Limited to design, administer and report on the findings of an electronic survey of all the Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako that were established as at 30 September 2016. The survey was conducted in mid-October and included all 34 Communities of Learning with endorsed achievement challenges (a total of 290 schools), and 114 approved Communities of Learning that were working toward having their achievement challenges and action plan endorsed by the Minister of Education.

Survey participants included one representative (principal) from each of the approved Communities of Learning. For endorsed Communities of Learning, participants included all appointed leaders, principals, across-community teachers, within-school teachers, and Board of Trustees chairs. Figure 45, below, shows the actual number of respondents and the response rates for each of these groups.

Figure 45: Respondents and response rates: October 2016 survey of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako

The survey was designed in consultation with Ministry staff and ERO, with the framework for the survey questions based on the Ministry’s draft domains and ERO’s Building Collective Capacity for Improvement model (ERO, 2017a). Key questions were developed to correspond with each of the elements in the model which includes:

- four key characteristics needed to build collective capacity for improvement – shared purpose and common focus, plan of action, joint work, monitoring and evaluation
- three enabling conditions needed to build collective capacity for improvement – leadership, trust and communication, infrastructure and resources.

To maximise the quality and rate of response, the survey was designed to be well focused and as efficient as possible for respondents to complete, comprising mostly closed questions with a few open question fields.

The survey included a set of central questions in both the approved and endorsed Community of Learning surveys. These questions covered: purpose and focus; actions to date; joint work; and plan of action.
Respondents were also invited to answer a limited number of voluntary questions that related more specifically to their role within the community. These questions covered achievement challenges, support received, monitoring and evaluation, and barriers and enablers to implementation. The maximum number of voluntary questions was 13 and they were for the community leader, principals of endorsed communities, and the representative principal for the approved communities.

External quality assurance checks were undertaken on the survey design. The surveys were also piloted, and amendments made based feedback from the Ministry and ERO, and pilot results.

Communities of Learning were informed about the upcoming survey by the Ministry's Regional Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako Lead Advisors in October 2016. Education Technology Ltd then sent each of the identified respondents an email inviting them to complete the survey. While the survey was in the field for two weeks, Education Technology Ltd sent two email reminders to respondents.

**Early adopter key informant interviews (April 2016)**

In April 2016, the Ministry’s Research and Evaluation team interviewed leaders from Communities of Learning referred to as “early adopters”. These communities had endorsed achievement challenges and an appointed leader. Nine Communities of Learning were selected from the first two tranches approved by the Minister between December 2014 and end of March 2015. Communities of Learning were selected on the basis that a community leader had been appointed and their achievement challenges had been endorsed by the Minister.

These communities were from four of the Ministry's 10 regions. A total of 13 key informant interviews included 10 community leaders (there were two leaders in one large community), plus two support principals and one external expert. Ministry Lead Advisors also took part in a group interview.
A guide to understanding the progress of your Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako
A guide to understanding the progress of your Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako

This guide contains a Development Map to support you to identify potential areas of development for your Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako.

How the Development Map works

The Development Map is divided into six domains shown below, with a number of key areas under each domain.

**COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING | KĀHUI AKO - DOMAINS OF DEVELOPMENT**

- **DOMAIN 1**
  - Teaching: collaboratively for the best learning outcomes for every child.

- **DOMAIN 2**
  - Leading: for progress and achievement for every child and every teacher.

- **DOMAIN 3**
  - Evidence: guiding our practice and actions.

- **DOMAIN 4**
  - Pathways: developing and connecting along the whole educational journey for every child.

- **DOMAIN 5**
  - Partnering: with families, employers, iwi and community.

- **DOMAIN 6**
  - Building: a thriving Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako.

Each Community of Learning will be at different stages of development for each key area within the six domains. The following terms are used to describe points of progress within a Kāhui Ako: establishing, developing, embedding, and fully functioning.

The Development Map is not a tool to rate your progress, rather a guide to help you understand where you are now and where you might be heading in the future. The embedding and fully functioning indicators require significant changes in how we teach, and how we organise learning to maximise progress and achievement for every learner on their personalised pathway.

We want this guide to be useful for Communities of Learning, and to evolve over time with your input and feedback.

To complete the guide:

1. Work through the Development Map and under each of the key areas within the six domains (shown in different colours) circle the text/s which best describe your Community Learning | Kāhui Ako (as in the example shown here).

2. Identify up to three domains that you would like to explore further.

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Development Map
Domain 3
Evidence guiding our practice and actions.

Establishing
Pre-assessment, achievement challenges, recruitment and planning.

Developing
Shifting from co-operation to collaboration.

Embedding
Collaboration leads to collective impact.

Fully functioning
Collaboration is systemic, sustainable, self-improving, connected beyond.

Student progress and achievement

We are identifying what evidence and data we currently collect on student progress and achievement and using it to set our achievement challenges.

We are developing a shared approach to aggregating an initial range of data and evidence across the Kāhui Ako to inform inquiry activities and decisions about best practice improvement.

We have a shared approach to collecting evidence and data from a wide range of agreed qualitative and qualitative sources (including student, parent, whānau and whānau) to improve our practice. We can readily review evidence and evaluate our practice to understand our progress.

We are making use of aggregate data and evidence to measure and improve the progress and achievement of every child and young person in our Kāhui Ako.

Across our Kāhui Ako data and evidence are being used to comprehensively drive our actions to measure and improve our students’ progress and achievement.

We have expertise and systems to consistently collect and analyse evidence and data and we have the capability to use this to inform improvements in practice.

Data and evidence is the major driver of our Kāhui Ako’s practice.

We are continuously improving our progress and achievement data and evidence and use this to know how every one of our students is progressing.

We have a culture of collective improvement. We are reviewing our effectiveness by collecting and sharing data and evidence in our Kāhui Ako and with the broader network.

We are developing data management systems to support the sharing and use of data.

Our Kāhui Ako data management systems are aligned to support sharing of data in real time across the whole Kāhui Ako pathway.

We are building trust in the evidence and data we collect to make robust decisions about next steps for students.

We are building trust in the evidence and data we collect to make robust decisions about next steps for students.

We are developing data management systems to support sharing of data.

Our members’ data management systems are aligned to support sharing of data across the age 0-18 pathway. We have confidence in the data security and privacy arrangements for our Kāhui Ako data management system.

We are building trust in the evidence and data we collect to make robust decisions about next steps for students.

We are building trust in the evidence and data we collect to make robust decisions about next steps for students.

We are developing data management systems to support sharing of data.
As you work through the map, ask yourselves ‘What stage of development are we at?’ and ‘Is what we are doing within our Kāhui Ako making a difference to the progress and achievement of every child and young person?’

**DEVELOPMENT MAP**

**DOMAIN 4**

**Pathways** developing and connecting along the whole educational journey for every child.

**INTEGRATING THE LEARNING PATHWAY**

- Establishing
  - Pre-approval, achievement challenges, recruitment and planning
  - We are working on delivering our achievement challenges across the learning pathway. For example:
    - Our Kāhui Ako includes ECE providers
    - Our Akoranga and Whānau School Teachers work across the whole pathway
    - Our members are building an understanding of their collective involvement in the learning pathway
    - Our learning pathway is inclusive

**Supporting Transitions**

- Developing
  - Shifting from co-operation to collaboration
  - We have a plan of action for how we will work together to support learners at transition points between our organisations and at other transition points within and across our Kāhui Ako.

- Embedding
  - Collaboration leads to collective impact
  - We have identified the key transition points within our local education system (between member organisations and along the learner pathway) and identified key risks, issues and opportunities.
  - We have a particular focus on supporting the transitions of our students who need additional learning support.

- Fully functioning
  - Collaboration is systemic, sustainable, self improving, connected beyond
  - We have evidence-based practices in place to support successful and seamless transitions through the learner pathway - both within and outside of our Kāhui Ako.

**CAREER PATHWAYS**

- We are developing relationships with tertiary providers and employers to develop career-focused learning pathways that meet the needs and interests of our learners and communities.
  - We use destination data to understand the paths that children and young people take after they leave our Kāhui Ako.
  - We are using our careers advice in new ways across our Kāhui Ako to improve this information and support our children and young people have access to.

- We recognize the importance of career pathways and are identifying which tertiary providers and employers we should engage with.

- We have a connected and seamless approach for our students needing additional learning support.

- Our Kāhui Ako represents a full educational pathway from 0 to 18 and beyond and our Kāhui Ako curriculum and resource allocation reflects the rich nature of this pathway.

**A guide to understanding the progress of your Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako**

Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako
As you work through the map, ask yourselves 'What stage of development are we at?' and 'Is what we are doing within our Kāhui Ako making a difference to the progress and achievement of every child and young person?'

**Development Map**

**Domain 3**

**Partnering with families, employers, iwi and community.**

**Strong Community Engagement and Local Relationships**

- Establishing
  - Pre-approval, achievement challenges, recruitment and planning

- Developing
  - Shifting from co-operation to collaboration

- Embedding
  - Collaboration leads to collective impact

- Fully functioning
  - Collaboration is systemic, sustainable, self-improving, connected beyond

**Iwi Partnerships**

- We are identifying the key people and local organisations we need to engage with and involve.
- We are planning how we will engage with our community and are developing roles and accountabilities.
- We are communicating with our local iwi leaders about the establishment of our Kāhui Ako.
- Iwi are partners in our Kāhui Ako.

**Working with Employers**

- We are developing relationships with local employers and involving them in the work of our Kāhui Ako.
- Local employers are actively engaged in our Kāhui Ako to improve the learning outcomes and employment prospects of our children and young people.

A guide to understanding the progress of your Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako
As you work through the map, ask yourselves ‘What stage of development are we at?’ and ‘Is what we are doing within our Kāhui Ako making a difference to the progress and achievement of every child and young person?’

**SHARING RESOURCES**

We are identifying our respective and shared resources to deliver our vision and achievement challenges.

We have a clear action plan to tackle our achievement challenges. We have developed systems and processes with clear responsibilities and accountabilities for delivery.

We are using our achievement challenges to identify priority areas for joint planning.

We are sharing some resources across the Kāhui Ako and learning pathway to provide targeted support to increase collective impact and strengthen progress and achievement for our students.

We make key resourcing decisions together to effectively use collective resources to improve student progress and achievement across the Kāhui Ako. We can shift resources across ECE, schools and other settings.

We allocate resources flexibly at Kāhui Ako level in clear alignment with:
- our vision and achievement challenges
- our communities’ needs and goals
- the needs of students across the whole learning pathway
- where resources will have the greatest collective impact.

We partner with our community in joint planning, collaborative inquiry, professional learning and using evidence to inform our joint work to improve student progress and achievement.

**JOINT PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENT**

We are using our achievement challenges to identify priority areas for joint planning.

We regularly need to consider evidence and assess the impact of our teaching practice on student outcomes. We use this learning to inform our shared plans, practice and professional learning.

Our members are freeing up their time to work together collaboratively. We are identifying opportunities to reduce time and resources spent on non-achievement related activities e.g. maintenance, business services etc.

Our Kāhui Ako has effective support systems (including using new economies of scale) to enable leaders, teachers and learners to have the maximum focus on progress and achievement.

We ensure our collaborative delivery is improving practice rather than being additional activity and work.

We have explored, and where appropriate adopted new approaches to more efficiently purchase and manage non-achievement related activities in our Kāhui Ako.

We trust one another to deliver continuous improvement across our Kāhui Ako because we work together to identify, share and embed evidence based learning and practice.

**DELIVERING TOGETHER**

We have identified key resources and tasks we will use to work together e.g. organising meetings, administration, scheduling etc.

Our action plan:
- has clear leadership
- has been informed by engagement with teachers and communities
- includes a focus on building our capability to work together to deliver our shared goals
- has clear and agreed timelines
- works for all members – early learning and school.

We are proactively building the collective capability of our leaders, teachers and communities to improve learner outcomes. We are using feedback, learning and evidence to improve the way we work and operate more effectively as a Kāhui Ako.

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Bibliography


Lifting aspiration and raising educational achievement for every New Zealander