Student, Family and Community Engagement

Students who are engaged in learning while at school have an advantage that will serve them later in life. Schools and parents have many reasons to work towards common goals. Many schools have set up or become involved in projects to improve student engagement and enhance student achievement.

There are various influences on student engagement, among them the classroom climate and the wider school environment, student relationships with their teachers and peers, and the involvement of their families and communities in student learning.

National and international studies show that New Zealand students are generally engaged positively in their learning. They are positive about the subjects they are learning, their teachers and working with other students. Most students have a strong connection to their school and attend regularly. Most stay on beyond the years of compulsory schooling, and many go on to tertiary institutions to continue their education.

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

**Engagement with Learning**

The more students engage with learning, the more successful they are likely to be. Students with positive attitudes tend to achieve better, so it is a concern that some become less positive about learning as they get older.

Students’ attitudes, interests and liking for a subject have a strong bearing on their achievement. NEMP 2007 looked at Years 4 and 8 students’ curriculum preferences and perceptions of achievement in the areas of graphs, tables and maps, visual arts and science.

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Students preferred physical education, followed by visual arts and maths at Year 4 and technology at Year 8. Health, social studies and speaking were favoured least.

Art remains hugely popular with Year 4 students, with 76 percent saying they liked it ‘heaps’ and 71 percent saying they would like to do more of it. Year 4 results were remarkably consistent between 1999 and 2007. Students’ self-perceptions of their artistic abilities and the popularity of art drop fairly dramatically by Year 8, but art is still popular, with 44 percent saying they like it ‘heaps’ and 50 percent saying they would like to do more. Although the Year 8 results for 2007 and 2003 are similar, there has been a decline in enthusiasm and perception since 2003, which, in turn, was lower than 1999. Students said that they are most likely to see art at school rather than elsewhere.

Year 4 students were generally very positive about science at school, with 64 percent saying they liked doing it and 71 percent saying they would like to do more at school. They were less confident that they learned a lot of science at school; however, only 24 percent said they learned ‘heaps’ and 12 percent said their class did really good things in science ‘heaps’. An increasing proportion of students over the last eight years felt that they had very limited opportunities to learn science; 16 percent said they had learned ‘very little’ in science at school in 2007 compared with 8 percent in 1999; and 15 percent said they ‘never’ did really good things in science compared with 5 percent in 1999.

Year 8 students were less positive about science at school, a common trend among national monitoring surveys. Older students tend to be more discerning and critical, as well as more realistic of their own abilities. However, the trends across time mirrored the changes monitored in Year 4 students; the number of students particularly enjoying science between 1999 and 2007 dropped from 37 percent to 24 percent and the number who said their class ‘never’ did really good things in science rose from 8 percent to 16 percent.

**ENGAGEMENT AT SCHOOL**

Participating in education is fundamental to student achievement. Most indicators show that 80–90 percent of New Zealand students appear to be effectively engaged in schooling. This includes students who attend on a regular basis and stay on at school, the qualifications they achieve while at school (see Chapter One) and their progression to tertiary education. When students are engaged in learning, they actively participate in school and classroom activities, and feel both safe and a sense of belonging at school.

**Retention of Students in Senior Secondary Schooling**

A key indicator of continuing engagement is retention – the proportion of students who continue to attend school beyond the minimum school leaving age. Retention rates are influenced by the level of engagement that students have with school and the availability of alternatives such as employment and learning opportunities in tertiary institutions.

In 2007, 81 percent of 16-year-olds, 61 percent of 17-year-olds and 13 percent of 18-year-olds stayed on at school. Figure 2.1 shows that the apparent rate of retention of 16-year-olds, 17-year-olds and 18-year-olds has been steady over the past four years, although it has dropped slightly since the late 1990s.
Measuring Retention

The historical measures of student retention in senior secondary schools to age 16, age 17 and age 18 are estimates derived from the aggregate roll returns. They represent a snapshot of retention at a point in time, as at 1 July. The aggregate roll returns capture the ages of students only in years. These indicators are therefore a measure of those who stay at school to ages 16.5, 17.5 and 18.5 (on average) respectively.

Also, since the denominator for each is the number of students in the 1 July roll return from the year students were aged 14, net migration can affect results.

In 2007 schools used a new method of electronic student roll collection to submit disaggregated school leaver data. Table 2.1 shows the results, for different methods, for the proportions of students remaining at school at these three ages in 2007.

Table 2.1: Comparing School Retention Measures, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Proportion of Students Retained to Age Aggregate Data</th>
<th>Apparent Retention as Percentage of Age 14 Roll Aggregate Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.0 %</td>
<td>17.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These two methods of data collection show large differences, the key factor being that they measure different age groups (for example, 16.5 in the disaggregate data and 16.0 in the aggregate data).

In 2007 there was improved retention to age 16, due to the reduction in the number of early leavers (see Early Leavers, page 30). Regardless of the source, it is clear that Māori student retention rates are lower than non-Māori – and that situation is not improving.

**Managing Student Enrolments**

A central electronic register for student enrolments (ENROL) was implemented in New Zealand schools in 2006–2007. For each student enrolled, this national database holds demographic information, the eligibility criteria under which students enter school, the year level, movements between schools and some information on their destination when they leave the school system.

This simple set of data is potentially very powerful for analysis because it records events over time. For example:

> some schools anecdotally report a high student turnover; the number of students coming and going between schools could be used to develop a more formal way to measure this

> some schools report on students who are only enrolled for short periods and the difficulty that this poses for continuity in their schooling.

ENROL can help us to understand the prevalence of short stays in schools and, over time, can quantify how much schooling students miss out on because ENROL records the actual date a student leaves school, it will be useful for analysing leaving patterns.

Secondary schools have used ENROL since July 2006, and we can quantify the stated destination of 2007 school leavers28 with it. Of these, 13,700 left school during the academic year, before 1 November 2007, and a further 43,300 left school at the end of the year and had not enrolled in school by 1 March 2008.

Around 50 percent of 2007 school leavers who left during the academic year stated employment as their destination. Figure 2.2 shows the proportion is higher for 16- and 17-year-old school leavers than 18-year-old school leavers. Leavers who complete the academic year are more likely to be transitioning to further education or training.

**Attendance**

Regular attendance at school is fundamental to student achievement and leads to better life outcomes for students. Truancy impacts on student safety and community well-being. Over time, patterns of non-attendance can place students at risk of poor achievement and early disengagement from school.

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It is therefore important to recognise gaps in attendance and help students re-engage in learning as soon as possible.

A student is truant if he or she is away from school without good reason. Most students attend school every day, but recent Ministry of Education attendance surveys show that around 4 percent of students are truant for part or all of the day. Secondary school students and students of Māori and Pasifika ethnicities have much higher rates of truancy than other students.

There are legal and regulatory requirements relating to school attendance in the Education Act 1989, Attendance Regulations 1951 and National Administration Guidelines (NAGs). Under the Education Act 1989, parents and carers of children between age six and 16 can be prosecuted if they keep letting their child be away from school without good reason.

There is a variety of strategies and resources in place to support schools to manage attendance and truancy, including District Truancy Services (DTS), ENROL, Non-enrolment Truancy Service, Student Engagement Initiative (SEI), Electronic Attendance Register and Attendance Guidelines.

The Ministry of Education provides $4.5 million (Crown) per annum to support 89 DTS across New Zealand. DTS support schools in managing students who are truant on a persistent or recurrent basis. All state schools are entitled to access their local DTS.

A student aged under 16 who is not enrolled at any school for 20 days or more is considered to be non-enrolled. The ENROL system notifies the Ministry of this.

Non-enrolment is not as simple as students not showing up at school. There are many reasons why students stay out of school, for example, health and family issues, transience and the effect of a sudden trauma (such as the death of a family member).

ENROL will, over time, generate better information about transient students, enrolment patterns among different groups of students and what happens to those who are not enrolled in the system for a significant time.

**Alternative Education**

Some students aged 13–15 with difficulties engaging with school can re-engage through an alternative education programme. Positive outcomes for students with significant barriers to learning include regular attendance and improved literacy and numeracy.

During 2007, 3,167 students were involved in alternative education. These students tended to be male and Māori, with half aged 14, two-thirds male and three-fifths Māori. Of the 3,167, 32 percent returned to an alternative education programme in 2008, 26 percent continued their education elsewhere (for example, with The Correspondence School or in a mainstream school) and 5 percent moved on to employment.
Staying at School

International evidence clearly indicates that the longer students engage in schooling, the better their outcomes in later life. Students who stay at school into the senior secondary years usually have better health, more stable employment and higher earnings than early leavers. There is also a link between staying on at school and reduced offending in adolescence.

New Zealanders aged 15–64 with higher qualifications have better employment prospects and incomes. In 2007, the unemployment rate of those with a bachelor’s degree or a higher qualification was 2.2 percent, compared with 2.5 percent for those with ‘another tertiary’ qualification, 3.8 percent for those with school qualifications and 6.3 percent for those with no qualifications. The median weekly income in 2007 was $850 for those with a bachelor’s or higher qualification, $651 for those with a vocational or trade qualification, $502 for those with another post-school qualification, $378 for those with school qualifications and $337 for those with no qualifications.

Early Leavers

After seven years without significant change, the number of 15-year-olds receiving early leaving exemptions halved in 2007.

To reduce the relatively high number of early leavers, the Ministry of Education strengthened its early leaving application and approval process in May 2007 by:

> interpreting the early leaving legislative criteria more strictly, setting a very high threshold for eligibility
> ensuring direct contact between parents and Ministry staff at the first stage in the early leaving application process, to actively dissuade early leaving and support parents to find ways of keeping their children engaged in learning
> encouraging alternatives to early leaving, such as a combination of school- and work-based learning.

The evidence so far suggests the new process has been successful. The demand for early leaving exemptions declined by 28 percent from 2006 to 2007, and the number of declined applications increased from less than 7 percent in 2006 to 36 percent in 2007. The net effect is that 3.2 percent of 15-year-olds were granted an early leaving exemption in 2007, a 50 percent reduction from 2006.

Consultation in 2006 with 15-year-old students granted early leaving exemptions, their caregivers and schools shows that, typically, early leavers are regular truants, struggle academically, experience difficult home lives, perceive school environments as ‘exclusive’ and are attracted to leave by money or friends outside school. These factors can contribute to their disengagement.

When asked what could have changed or been done differently to encourage them to stay at school, three-quarters of all young people pointed to school-level factors. They would have liked the opportunity to study part time while working towards a post-school qualification, to have greater flexibility in the curriculum and to experience the world of work while still at school.

One-to-one career guidance and support from Career Services is newly available to students whose early leaving applications have been declined. The aim is to demonstrate the relevance of school-based learning to students and their families and keep these students engaged with schooling for longer.

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30 Statistics New Zealand, New Zealand Income Survey (June 2007 quarter).
Youth Transition Services provides follow-up support to students whose early leaving applications are approved. The aim is to improve the assistance and guidance these young people receive as they move from school to other appropriate options.

### Improving Student Engagement

The Suspension Reduction Initiative (SRI), established in 2001, aimed to reduce the disproportionate number of Māori students being suspended. Schools with historically high suspension rates for Māori students took part.

The SRI is now part of the SEI, a programme designed to reduce suspensions, exclusions and early leaving exemptions, and to increase attendance. Between 80 and 100 schools a year receive support and funding to develop approaches that will raise their levels of student engagement.

The SEI has lowered suspension rates in its original cohort of secondary schools. The overall age-standardised suspension rate for these schools dropped from 35 students per 1,000 in 2000 to 18 students per 1,000 in 2007, a reduction of 48 percent. This compares with a slight increase in the overall age-standardised suspension rate for secondary schools that have never been part of the SEI over the same period. For examples of good practice in SEI schools, see the case studies on page 39.

### Broadening Curriculum Choices

Gateway and the Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR) broaden educational options for senior secondary students by offering them work-based learning or courses with tertiary providers. These courses can lead to the attainment of credits in NCEA or recognised tertiary qualifications.

Schools use resources such as Gateway and STAR, and the curriculum’s flexibility, to develop broad programmes of learning that work for their students.

In 2007, 16,587 school students undertook courses with tertiary providers through STAR and 8,239 students participated in work-based learning through Gateway.

Annette Joyce, principal of Rotorua Girls’ High School, sees a ‘feathering of the edges between secondary and tertiary’ as being crucial to assisting retention. Looking at its leaving data, the school observed a number of students applying for early leaving exemptions to attend a hairdressing course. Offering this as an option at school retained a group of students that otherwise would have left.

The course is designed to give students a taster of the industry and still has broad educational value. Annette describes this as finding ‘the hook’ that will keep her students ‘engaged, motivated and learning’.

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52 The age-standardised stand-down and suspension rates remove differences due to one group having an older or younger population, providing an estimate of how groups of schools, or overall rates by year, might compare if they had the same age distribution.

Behaviour

Behaviour is an important element of learning within all levels of the curriculum framework; for example, managing self and relating to others (The New Zealand Curriculum), and well-being and belonging (Te Whāriki) are core competencies.

One of the most pressing issues our education system faces is supporting students considered to be at risk of educational and societal failure. Many of these students exhibit behaviour difficulties. Schools, families and students share the responsibility for and responses to reducing disruptive behaviour, with the Ministry providing support and leadership. Positive school cultures or safe learning environments require cross-school approaches to tackling bullying or poor behaviour. Best-practice schools are strong on all these elements.

The provision of targeted support for students with moderate and severe behaviour difficulties recognises and supports the additional workload for teachers. This support includes around 780 Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) who itinerate within clusters of schools, an enhanced programme fund, activity centres, Eliminating Violence programmes (around 40 schools) and the SEI.

Following the ERO evaluation of RTLB in 2004, the Ministry developed the RTLB Policy and Toolkit, which was rolled out to schools in 2007. Schools have reviewed their operational documents to align with this.

Schools and Special Education (GSE) are also working together to develop protocols, to ensure that students get the support they need. RTLB undertook joint professional development with GSE, including Effective Interventions for Challenging Behaviour (EICB) training. Other RTLB engaged with the Inservice Teacher Educator Practice Project (INSTEP), which aims to strengthen in-service teacher education practice. This enables RTLB to improve support to teachers, who can then better meet the needs of students. In the RTLB annual report, 156 clusters commented on their satisfaction levels with the RTLB service. The majority said they were satisfied with the service RTLB provided, with ten clusters receiving ‘excellent’ ratings.

Support and interventions for children with the most severe behaviour problems are critical. These behaviours are persistent, outside the age-expected norm and expressed across social settings. Research shows that these behaviours are a high cost to individuals and society. Severe behaviour in childhood leads to poor adult outcomes. The recent report to government of the Advisory Group for Conduct Problems notes that the public cost of providing services to children with severe conduct problems is about ten times that for children of the same age without conduct problems.

References:


[35] Schools are responsible for the behaviour of their students. NAG 5 (i) requires school boards of trustees to provide a safe physical and emotional environment. Boards provide behaviour management plans that set out the policies for behaviour expected across the school. Professional leadership and effective teaching are key.


Support for students with severe behaviour problems includes:

- B4 School Checks (Ministry of Health) – behaviour assessment for the under-fives
- Incredible Years Parent Training Programme – an effective programme where 75 percent of children aged 3–8 years whose parents go through it return to a prosocial pathway
- Severe Behaviour Service – 200 staff supporting 4,500 students
- Interim Response Fund – introduced in 2007 to support and strengthen school systems, keep students engaged in schooling or re-engage students following significant challenging behavioural events; in the first year it supported 800 students
- Special Education Professional Learning and Development programme – designed to upskill 430 behaviour specialists
- Residential Behaviour Schools – involves three schools, 100 students per year
- Project Early – two clusters including 90 students
- Social Workers in Schools – 122 staff working with 330 low decile schools
- High and Complex Needs Unit – jointly managed by the Ministries of Health, Education and Social Development.

Bullying

Bullying is a safety issue that has a wide-reaching impact on both the recipients and the initiators. Bullying in any form is harmful and should always be treated seriously. There must be a clear and consistent response to establish that this behaviour is unacceptable in the school community.

While bullying may have little effect on resilient students, it can cause a great deal of harm to those with inadequate support. There is less bullying in schools where there is regular support for those who are bullied.

Many approaches, programmes and interventions support schools in creating positive learning environments, and schools can use whichever they believe will meet their particular need:

- a whole-school approach takes a holistic view and helps to define school values, policies and practices, environment and partnerships. Effective teaching is about establishing a positive learning environment that engages all learners. Whole-school approaches involve all levels of the school community including students, staff, principals, boards of trustees, primary caregivers and the wider community

- classroom-based interventions involve the specific implementation of a set of curriculum resources or programmes to support the development of good social, emotional and life skills. They focus on key competencies such as managing self and relating to others

- targeted interventions focus on the needs of students who are considered at higher risk of being bullied or becoming bullies. The primary aim is to foster improved coping skills and empower all students to learn and achieve personal excellence, regardless of their individual circumstances.

Schools can access the Supporting Positive Behaviours website for a range of evidence-based programmes to support building positive school cultures and manage bullying. It includes: New Zealand anti-bullying initiatives; resources and toolkits for New Zealand schools to reduce bullying and support positive learning environments; and international reading.

Kia Kaha, a New Zealand Police initiative, uses a whole-school approach to create a supportive climate. Teachers and Police Education Officers (PEOs) support the initiative through classroom curricula and student activities. A review of the Kia Kaha programme was carried out in 2005–2007, and compared bullying in 27 schools that had been in the programme for the three years with bullying in 22 schools that had not. The review showed that the Kia Kaha schools experienced:

- significantly less student victimisation by bullies
- a positive effect on school climate
- increased self-esteem and improved attitudes toward victims among students.

Creating a safe environment for reporting bullying helped to achieve these benefits. The evaluation also found that the flexibility of the programme and the support provided by PEOs were strengths.

**Stand-downs and Suspensions**

Standing-down or suspending students is one option a school may take in order to manage serious cases of disruptive or unsafe behaviour. The decision to stand-down or suspend is a difficult one because student engagement and learning may be further compromised by a student being taken out of school. Stand-downs and suspensions affect a small proportion of students, with less than 1 percent being suspended and 3 percent being stood-down in 2007.

The age-standardised stand-down rate increased from 26.0 students per 1,000 in 2000 to 31.3 students per 1,000 in 2006 but decreased to 29.3 students per 1,000 in 2007.

As in previous years, the most common reported behaviours that lead to a stand-down were continual disobedience, physical assault of other students and verbal abuse of a teacher. One of these three reasons was reported in 65 percent of all stand-downs in 2007.

The age-standardised suspension rate has decreased by 17 percent since 2000 (7.9 students per 1,000 in 2000 compared with 6.6 students per 1,000 in 2007), including a 6.1 percent reduction from 2006 to 2007.

The most common reported behaviours leading to a suspension in 2007 were continual disobedience, misuse of drugs and physical assault of other students. Between 2000 and 2007 there was a drop in the number of students suspended for drug-related behaviour and an increase in those suspended for continual disobedience and physical assault of other students.

The reduction in drug-related suspensions may be the result of a shift in attitude within schools to view and treat drugs as a health issue rather than primarily as a behaviour issue.

Stand-downs and suspensions are more frequent among males and young teenagers. Over 70 percent of cases involved males, and two-thirds involved students in the 13–15-year-old age group.
Student, Family and Community Engagement
There is a correlation between the socio-economic mix of a school and age-standardised suspension rates. Low decile schools (deciles 1 and 2) draw their students from communities with the highest degree of socio-economic disadvantage. These students are almost five times more likely to be suspended than students from decile 9 and 10 schools.

Māori students have the highest rate of suspensions and stand-downs. In 2007, the age-standardised suspension rate for Māori students (14.4 students per 1,000) was 1.7 times higher than Pasifika students (8.7 students per 1,000) and 3.6 times higher than European/Pākehā students (4.0 students per 1,000). Similarly, the age-standardised stand-down rate for Māori students (55.3 per 1,000) was 1.5 times higher than Pasifika students (37.5 students per 1,000) and 2.6 times higher than European/Pākehā students (21.0 per 1,000). Suspension and stand-down rates for Asian students are low.

Most suspended students return to some form of schooling, either returning to their own school, entering an alternative education programme or accessing The Correspondence School’s services. A small proportion leave schooling altogether.

**ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES**

At 1 July 2007, 759,906 students were enrolled in New Zealand schools, including those in alternative education, IFP students, adult students, gifted students and students with special needs. Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds, with increasing numbers being Māori, Pasifika and Asian. Schools need to recognise and value this diversity and build partnerships with families and communities to engage all of these students in compulsory schooling.

Connecting what goes on at school with students’ lives, parents, whānau and communities can make teaching and learning more relevant and effective. Research shows that families and whānau who play an important part in monitoring their children’s progress at school are more likely to have children who are successful learners. Teaching that taps into students’ cultural and out-of-school experiences can make learning more relevant and, as a consequence, more successful in the classroom.
Home–School Partnerships

As yet there is little clear evidence for what sort of involvement makes a difference to student achievement.\(^4\) Research suggests, however, that successful home–school partnerships display many of the following features:

- Collaborative and mutually respectful relationships between school and home
- Multiple dimensions and responsiveness to community needs
- Being well-planned, embedded within whole-school development plans, well resourced and reviewed regularly
- Effective parental engagement, which happens mainly at home
- Timely two-way communication between school and parents.

ERO evaluated\(^4\) schools’ engagement with parents, whānau and communities at 233 schools in 2007. This included meetings and discussions with parents, whānau and communities as well as with school personnel.

ERO found that parents, whānau and communities have high expectations that schools will support their children to become successful learners. Parents are usually pleased and willing to attend school events and support activities such as fundraising. Relationships that focus on children’s learning and achievement are most highly valued.

Parents and families noted that their involvement with school decreased as their children moved from primary to intermediate and on to secondary. Where partnerships between families and schools worked well, the benefits for students included:

- Having their parents, whānau and communities notice and celebrate their successes and achievements
- Feeling more motivated and engaged at school
- Talking about their school work at home
- Feeling more confident about their school work
- Finding transitions between schools easier
- Wanting to stay longer at school.

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Parents’ initial experiences often determine the relationship they have with their child’s school and teacher(s). Times of transition into school, between classes and between schools are crucial to the establishment of meaningful and respectful relationships. Positive experiences at this early stage generally lead to beneficial home-school partnerships.

ERO found that schools with very diverse communities had some of the most successful practices for engaging parents, whānau and families in ways that bridged cultural, language and socio-economic diversity. Their strategies built relationships, broke down barriers and gave parents the confidence to become involved in their children’s learning.

ERO also found that there are challenges to successful engagement. The most important challenge for schools was finding ways to involve and engage all parents, whānau and communities. The most challenging group were families that were ‘hard to reach’ or difficult to involve for various reasons. For parents, whānau and communities, the most significant challenges were: having the time to sustain engagement; living some distance from the school; developing and maintaining effective communication with the school; and feeling at ease in their child’s school environment. Parents believed that better communication, a more inclusive school environment and increased opportunities for involvement in their child’s learning could strengthen their partnership with schools.

CONCLUSION

Although most New Zealand students are actively engaged in education, educators face a number of challenges, especially around disciplinary issues, including student safety, school environment and managing difficult behaviours.

Professional leadership and effective teaching are key. The most effective interventions involving students, parents, family and whānau are those made early.

Students who leave school early and without qualifications risk lasting social and economic disadvantages as they move through adult life. After seven years without significant change, the number of 15-year-olds receiving early leaving exemptions has halved.
Positive Engagement Case Studies

These are examples of good practice from four SEI schools. Each school has focused on student retention and achievement, and improved the way they support students in their individual pathways. They have used student data to revise their student behaviour management policies and help students and their families overcome the cycle of disruptive behaviour.

Tangaroa College

Tangaroa College is a decile 1 secondary school in South Auckland where Pasifika students make up a significant proportion of the school roll (82 percent in 2007).

The school has been part of the SEI since 2001. During that time it has reduced its suspensions per 1,000 students from 36 in 2001 to 5 in 2007, and among Pasifika students from 31 in 2001 to 2 in 2007.

Keeping students engaged in learning and alert to educational opportunities is at the forefront of the school’s thinking. It focuses on a positive first point of contact with families by relating it to student engagement and achievement. Twice a year, at the start of term one and the end of term three, the senior leadership team and academic deans conduct personal interviews with each senior student and their caregivers, with the emphasis on academic goal-setting both now and in the future. Parents, students and teachers are also involved.

The school reports that the focus of conversations between students, staff and community is on student engagement, and links between student attendance and achievement are being made. As a result students’ attendance and achievement has improved.

The approach has helped students make the connection between career possibilities and their courses and studies. They feel more ownership of their learning as they can link it to their future prospects. Together with their families, they better understand the need for some subject choices that initially appear unrelated to a future career.

The school sees early contact with families as a key factor in resolving behavioural issues without resorting to stand-downs and suspensions. Senior and middle management work closely together to provide targeted support for students with learning and behavioural needs. After an initial interview, the students link up with a suitable support person employed by the school for ongoing mentoring, such as a youth worker, social worker, dean or guidance counsellor. An important part of this process is working with the student and their family to plan a learning pathway. This ongoing support appears to help these students understand the importance of learning and ensure that they choose appropriate courses of study.

Otumoetai College

Otumoetai College is a decile 8 secondary school in Tauranga. It was part of the SRI in 2001–2004, based on its 2000 suspension rates, which were then 16 per 1,000 students and 68 per 1,000 for Māori students.

By 2004 the Ministry identified Otumoetai College as a good-practice school because suspensions had dropped to one per 1,000 students. The school was also monitoring and analysing data more carefully and could identify trends and activities. They did not receive SEI funding after 2005, but the school continues to commit funds to ensure they meet all students’ learning and pastoral care needs and treat each student as an individual. They also continue to attend annual SEI conferences to share their good practice and learn new ideas.

Data collection and analysis, and observation of behaviours indicated to senior management that no one project would meet the needs of all at-risk students. Over the years the school has tried a number of approaches to meet the varied demands of their students. Most they have retained and others were either discarded or adapted. Some examples follow:

- a teacher aide was appointed to liaise with whānau and students who were at risk of suspensions. The aide facilitates interventions such as arranging counselling or helps to build new relationships
- a learning assistance programme was set up and a programme facilitator appointed to develop a meaningful curriculum for Year 9 and 10 home rooms. This programme is also designed to help the transition from intermediate and has a strong focus on literacy and numeracy
- a Learning Support Centre was established and is now very strong. It aims to identify the individual learning needs of every student and keeps staff informed. This programme deals with every student, not just those in the home rooms, and is a part of establishing individual pathways for them
- staff professional development over the last seven years has focused on teaching and learning. It is designed to help staff meet the needs of all students in their classes in different ways, and includes a Māori values model. Developing teaching methods to meet the diverse learning styles of students is paramount, which is why professional development concentrates on learning goals, differentiation and formative assessment
> two new senior administrators have strengthened the pastoral care team and lightened the load of deputy principals and deans. They provide support, guidance, pathways and other appropriate interventions for students at risk and facilitate communications across the school’s many programmes. This has enabled the school to explore alternatives to suspension

> an evening to recognise Māori achievement was held in 2007, based on the Kaipara College model,45 and was hugely successful with both Māori and European/Pākehā

> a deputy principal is responsible for developing student leadership at all year levels, allowing students of all ages to excel in a range of areas

> the school is also involved in a number of other initiatives including School Support Services, the NDP and the Ministry initiative on student health and well-being

> senior management, the pastoral care team and a rapidly increasing number of teaching staff are now committed to rehabilitation and restorative practices for student management. The move began two years ago and is school wide but, as the restorative training indicates, it will take up to five years to implement fully

> the school found that drug counselling and regular drug testing for those caught with drugs did not help students commit to change. Rehabilitation and dealing with the problem through the students and their parents is seen as a much more constructive option.

Suspension rates at Otumoetai dropped because there was a commitment to change the whole ethos of the college. The current school climate has evolved out of a commitment by management and staff to bring about change by not being scared to experiment with new ideas and approaches, to reflect on their success and failures, and to recognise that each student is an individual with individual needs. The school has consolidated good ideas and continues to explore ways for students to succeed and achieve in positive ways.

**Wanganui City College and Cullinane College**

Wanganui City College and Cullinane College are two low decile schools in Wanganui, with rolls of 500 and 300 students respectively. Over 40 percent of students are Māori in both schools.

These schools have identified their highly at-risk students and together put a strategy in place to support those students in their mainstream schooling.

Wanganui City College’s programme is called Tumataara. Cullinane College’s programmes are called Encounter for Year 9s and Navigator for Year 10s. As a result of these programmes, which have minor differences in structure, both schools have seen improvements in achievement, behaviour, attendance and retention.

In 2005, staff at the two schools each identified around 12 students whose behaviour and learning issues put them at high risk of suspension. These students also had a negative impact on their classes and the hauora (well-being) of other students.

They put in place the following:

> students ‘check in’ with assigned staff for the first period each Monday. They debrief the trauma/drama/hassles of the weekend, set some goals for the week and strategise about any trouble that might be brewing for the students

> students attend their usual classes and carry a tracking sheet. They get one point for turning up on time, one point for having the right gear, one point for appropriate participation in class and a further point for completing work. Students and staff set goals for a gradual points improvement each week

> teachers are supported to use positive and effective strategies with the students in their classes, and to reinforce the behaviours that the tracking sheet measures

> students also check in with staff on a Wednesday, and together they deal with any emerging issues. Because Tumataara and Encounter are timetabled as an option class, they might do social skills work, extra literacy work or extra physical education

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45 An end-of-year celebration evening to honour the success and achievements of Māori teenagers, but where all students and family are welcome, held annually at Kaipara College since 2002. http://www.edgazette.govt.nz/articles.php?action=view&id=7025
an alcohol and other drug worker from the district health board runs a small group intervention with the students when needed.

on a Friday afternoon students who achieve their points goal are rewarded. This could be a family-based reward, a school-based activity or an off-site activity.

caregivers and families are ‘in the loop’ and join in a celebration at the end of the year.

there has also been intensive classroom-based professional development in effective teaching.

A 2007 evaluation of the initiatives found that:

- attendance rates increased from 78 percent in Year 9 (2006) to 88 percent in Year 10 (2007)
- behaviour/discipline incidents, which were high (average 7.4 per student) in term one, decreased markedly in terms two to four. There were an average of four recorded incidents per student in the second half of the year.
- across several literacy and numeracy assessments, students’ average progress ranged from 0.6 to 1.2 stanines over the year.

Over the last three years, NCEA achievement rates have improved markedly to be ahead of decile norms in most fields.

The SEI and Innovations Funding Pool for at-risk students have supported this work since 2007.