



He Iho Ruruku

"The innate commitment that binds us, our connection and relationship to each other"

English medium perspectives

Learning to learn, learning to live
in a COVID-19 Aotearoa



Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa

ERO's vision is grounded in New Zealanders' aspirations for education and our ambition of Equity and Excellence in outcomes for Māori learners.

Quality education is the right of every child and young person in Aotearoa and is underpinned by learning environments that place the learner and learner outcomes at the centre of all activity.

Successful learning organisations are those that are on a continuous, deliberate and future-focused journey of improvement, using evidence to shape their direction and decision making.

Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa

Ko te mātauranga kōunga tētahi mōtika mā ia tamaiti, mā ia rangatahi kei Aotearoa, ā, ko te tūāpapa o taua mātauranga kōunga, ko ngā taiao e noho ai te ākonga me ōna huanga ki te pūtake o te kaupapa.

Ko ngā ratonga mātauranga angitu, ko ērā ka manawanui ki te kōkiri i ngā kaupapa kia anga whakamua ai, ā, mā ngā taunakitanga e whai ahunga, e whai whakataunga.

He Iho Ruruku 2021: English medium perspectives

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Kupu whakataki

Introduction

Whakatauāki

“He iho mauri tū, ka tina ki runga
He iho mauri ora, ka tāmōre ki raro
Whītiki rukutia
Ka puta ki te whai ao
Ki te ao mārama.”¹

In March 2020, the onset of COVID-19 caused major disruptions to key services in Aotearoa including the compulsory education sector. English medium education faced a variety of complex challenges, and given the abruptness of the situation, principals, boards of trustees, and staff had to quickly prepare whānau and learners for a new mode of online learning. Principals and teachers responded well, given the limited time and resources available for distribution. Wellbeing and quality of engagement was at the heart of their approach, working closely with the school community to ensure staff, learners and their whānau had what they needed to begin learning from home.

Despite a ‘digital divide’ and lack of other resources that learners would normally need, Principals and staff reported a rise in learner and whānau engagement in online learning. In May 2021, ERO released *Te Muka Here Tangata – The strand that binds people*, a COVID-19 case study of eight, low-decile English-medium schools with high populations of Māori students in the Bay of Plenty and East Coast regions.

The focus of this report was on Māori learners’ wellbeing within the English-medium setting, and their engagement and learning progress during lockdown and on return to school. The report revealed that leaders, teachers and the school’s wider community went above and beyond to support whānau wellbeing and learner engagement and progress during COVID-19, despite facing challenges which included a lack of resources, inadequate access to digital devices and internet connectivity, and greater financial pressure placed on whānau.

In August 2021, Aotearoa went back into lockdown with the emergence of COVID-19 once again in the community. This report explores the perspectives of English medium principals, trustees, and staff who had just six hours to prepare, organise and manage the distribution of hard packs and devices in the lead up to the country’s second lockdown.

1. The essence of care is to nurture the life force of others. The essence of wellbeing, binds and strengthens the collective. Our existence becomes clearer.

Why did we do this research?

Most Māori learners, 97%, attend English medium schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Te Muka Here Tangata provided major insights into the way English medium leaders worked through COVID-19 in 2020.

He Iho Ruruku is a longitudinal inquiry that focuses on the second wave of COVID-19, the Delta variant. This is the first phase of this study, that began in September 2021. It looks at the response of English medium principals, trustees, staff and learners as they return to the provision of education online. This approach supported them to maintain working together while ensuring they upheld the values and vision across their education provision.

ERO sought to better understand how and what English medium leaders do to support their communities. English medium schools worked in collaboration with ERO to ensure our evaluation insights reflect their perspectives and demonstrate how their communities use their collective strengths to support learning through COVID, and to influence outcomes that benefit Māori.

The lessons learnt from the previous COVID-19 lockdown influence the principals and trustees as they consider the wellbeing of students, staff and whānau. This work will look at the transition of students to online learning and eventually back to school with the scaling down of alert levels by the Ministry of Health (MoH).

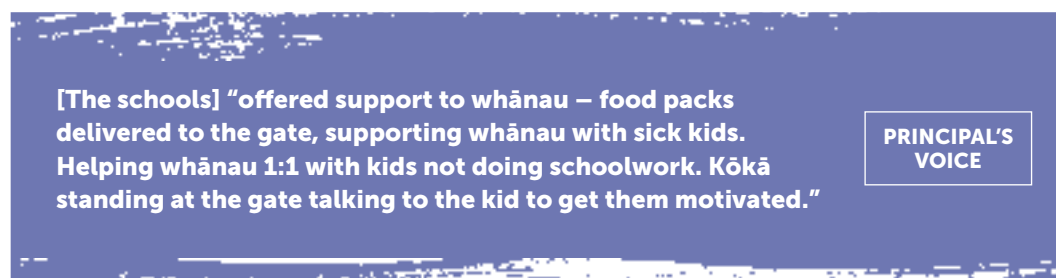
Horopaki: The context for evaluation

ERO acknowledges the 14 schools that participated in the first phase of this research. The schools represent a range of deciles from large urban areas through to small rural townships. Seven of the schools located in Auckland experienced extended periods of lockdown.

The group included, Kaiti School (Years 1-6), Whangara School, Ohakune School, Potaka School, Te Kura o Te Wainui-ā-Rua (Years 1-8), Tolaga Bay Area School (Years 1-15), Monrad – Te Kura Waenga o Tirohanga (Years 7-8), Westlake Girls High, Manurewa High School, Glenfield College, Northcote College, Kaipara College, Rangitoto College and Mangere College (Year 9-13).

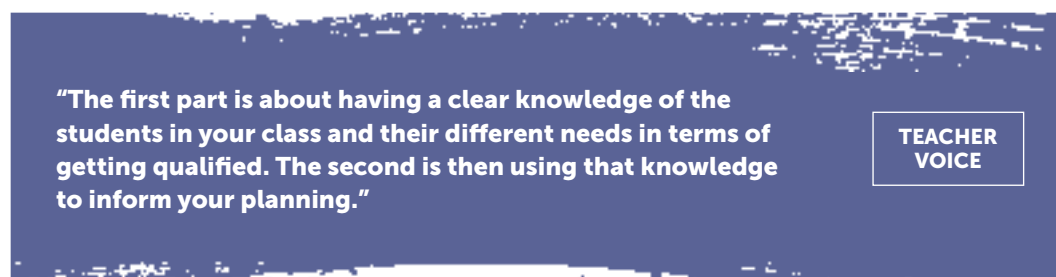
The lessons from 2020

All leaders in English medium schools acknowledged that COVID-19 creates a range of complex and multifaceted challenges which must be addressed as a community to ensure students, staff and whānau are well cared for and able to continue learning.



Te Muka Here Tangata found that school staff consistently put the health, safety and wellbeing of learners and their whānau at the forefront of decision-making, demonstrating manaakitanga and creativity to respond to whānau and learners with additional needs.

As well as quickly implementing strategies to keep lines of communication open with whānau, schools and teachers adopted creative curriculum changes to keep most learners motivated and to maintain tikanga and school values.



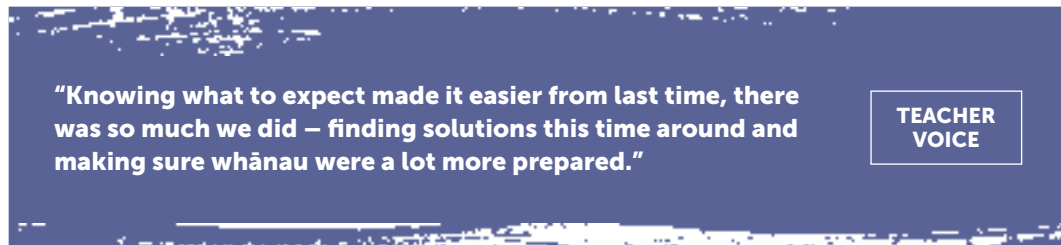
ERO found that leaders and school staff were better prepared to support distance learning and whānau wellbeing when certain systems, practices and conditions were evident prior to, and during, the COVID-19 Alert Levels 1-4 of 2020. These included:

- strong leadership and governance practice, shared responsibility and decision-making driven by collaborative school communities with effective communication practices
- learners’ access to meaningful and differentiated learning experiences and resources that developed their linguistic and cultural capabilities, and their ability to participate in te ao Māori
- teachers and whānau having access to appropriate hard copy learning materials, digital technology, adequate devices and reliable internet connections
- evolving digital curriculums and teacher capability to use technology effectively as a teaching and learning tool².

2. Te Muka Here Tangata, (ERO, 2021). Retrieved from [Te Muka Here Tangata – The strand that binds people | Education Review Office \(ero.govt.nz\)](https://www.ero.govt.nz/review-office/te-muka-here-tangata-the-strand-that-binds-people)

As schools prepared at short notice for the August 2021 lockdown, it became apparent that most felt better prepared for online learning due to the lessons learnt in 2020. These schools had greater access to devices and connectivity than in 2020. In some schools, devices were prioritised for older students, Māori students and those at risk of disengaging. For these schools, online learning had become a regular feature of the classroom programme since 2020.

Almost all schools issued hundreds of school-owned devices to ensure students were prepared for online learning. A majority of secondary students had mobile phones that could access the internet but weren't suited for learning. Staff reported greater levels of confidence and capability in working on digital learning platforms.



A key learning from 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns was around communication. Leaders were able to take a proactive approach during 2021 lockdowns and all schools reported the importance of regular, concise communication with familiar communication channels such as private Facebook pages, messenger groups and emails.

There was an element of familiarity amongst leaders with the government's processes and the daily announcements which enabled leaders to keep whānau and staff well informed. To some degree this also lessened the anxiety experienced by staff and whānau as they knew what to expect and could rely on schools for up-to-date information.

In 2021, most schools made their own hard packs to support student learning and ensured whānau had access to these during the 2021 lockdown. Due to the difficulty schools had accessing suitable hard packs in 2020, most participant schools did not apply for the MoE packs in 2021.

Almost all secondary schools had developed and maintained personalised individual learning programmes for students to ensure they were more responsive to student needs. Most secondary schools gained a greater understanding of NZQA processes for collecting evidence of learning and Learning Recognition Credits (LRC). Most secondary schools established more effective ways to monitor and support Māori students' progress.

“A generic solution doesn’t work for Māori students. Individualising teaching programs and individual support does.”

PRINCIPAL VOICE

PRINCIPAL VOICE **“Year 13 Māori students needed specific support around scholarships. We made more phone calls to support them through the application.”**

“We created a new position, ‘Ka Manaaki mentor’, particularly for Māori – supporting those students in class and across the board. We introduced mātauranga Māori into the program and increased the visibility of tikanga Māori – this role has been instrumental in supporting Māori students and whānau during lockdown.”

LEADER VOICE

All schools in this research had adopted a ‘do it for yourself’ approach. Almost all school leaders echoed similar sentiments.

“We rely on ourselves – we do it for ourselves.”

PRINCIPAL VOICE



Ngā Kitenga

Findings

Influence of COVID-19 2020 on current roles and responsibilities

Principals and leaders were mindful of the lessons learnt in 2020 around wellbeing, and it remained a key focus during the 2021 lockdowns. Most schools reported that they redeployed staff and funding to further support wellbeing. Principals and trustees closely monitored the directives from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and maintained a strong focus on remaining connected to students, staff and whānau. There was an element of familiarity with government processes amongst leaders which created greater ease.

It was evident that principals and trustees made strategic and influential decisions to ensure students and whānau were not disadvantaged, even in situations where there was a shortage of devices and learning resources.

In 2021, it was clear that principals, trustees and schools felt more prepared. Due to the difficulty accessing devices and suitable learning packs in 2020, most principals took a pro-active stance to ensure they were ready with what they needed for another similar eventuality. There has been an uptake in online learning since 2020 and most whānau now have access to Wi-Fi.

To support student learning, teachers took on roles of support and advocacy – in addition to teaching – for smaller groups of students. These teachers would check in regularly with the student and their whānau to monitor wellbeing and academic progress.

There was a closer monitoring of students with special needs in 2021. Schools regularly accessed Urgent Response Funding (URF) and utilised Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) to support students in need.

Most schools reported they adapted the way in which they engage with whānau and had a greater focus on wellbeing.

Seven of the fourteen schools noted that the MoE were very supportive, more accommodating and provided more responsive support during the 2021 lockdowns. This perspective was more prevalent in Auckland secondary schools. Half of the participant schools noted that the MoE provided clearer messaging in 2021 which was concise and easy to understand.

“MoE flow of comms has been fantastic. The regional director has been visible and active, gathering feedback and making changes. Short sharp info – alert-level specific.”

**PRINCIPAL
VOICE**

Leadership

Leadership had a key focus on wellbeing as most leaders had learnt the hard way about exhaustion and fatigue in 2020.



Most leaders put in place strategies to support teachers who had dependants at home, encouraging them to prioritise the needs of their own whānau before focusing on teaching.

Leaders learnt a considerable amount about communication in 2020 and were keen to ensure communication strategies were effective as they navigated lockdowns in 2021. Communications were more organised and well thought through. Often there was one key leader communicating with whānau and this proved to be helpful for their communities.

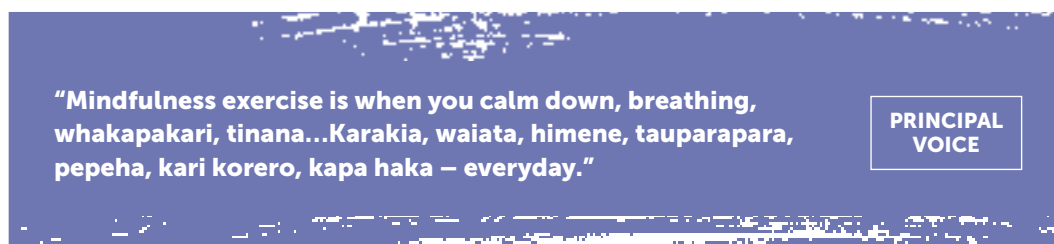
The daily newsletters from the Secretary for Education were seen as critical to the communication thread. Principals would extract what was relevant and communicate this to staff and whānau in a seamless fashion. Communication was effective and regular. Staff, students and whānau were well informed which lessened the anxiety and alleviated stress.

Wellbeing

Principals, trustees and staff prioritised wellbeing above all else. The lessons from 2020 taught schools about what best supported staff, students and whānau. Most schools took a practical approach to supporting whānau by providing food, basic care packages, devices and hard packs for learning in the first week of lockdown.

Almost all schools paused teaching for the first week of lockdown to give staff the opportunity to be with whānau and organise their home routines. In schools where learning programmes started in week two of the lockdown, staff noted the benefit this had to their wellbeing and that of their whānau.

Schools focused heavily on strategies which ensured students and their whānau felt safe, secure and had a strong sense of belonging. There was a clear focus on oranga wairua and mindfulness.



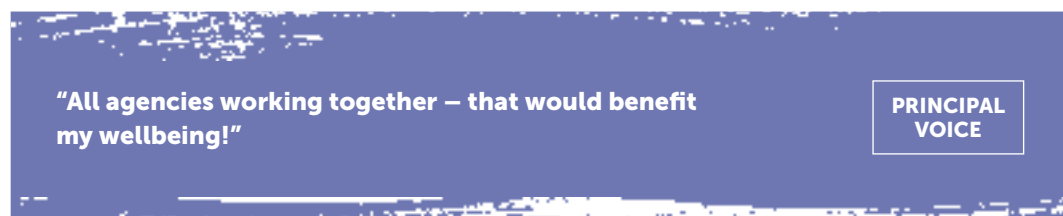
Schools put in place systems for monitoring and checking in on students, staff and whānau to provide greater support as needed. A key component of whānau wellbeing was around cultural wellbeing. Schools worked hard to listen to their whānau and incorporate approaches which supported te ao me ōna tikanga Māori.

Teachers used a range of tools to remain connected with students and their whānau. Most teachers reported that they had learnt over the past 12 months which tools worked best for each whānau. Whanaungatanga, manaaki and tikanga guided most schools in the wellbeing space with a clear focus on people first. Daily karakia and Zoom connects featured across schools as a way to keep students and whānau engaged.

Principals ensured staff were well resourced and had everything they needed to deliver online learning for students. Staff felt more prepared this time to manage workloads. They adjusted when needed to engage with learners in a way which suited their needs and responsibilities at home.

When principals were asked about their own wellbeing, there were very few responses as most were more concerned with how students, staff and whānau were coping. A large majority of leaders and trustees reflected on the impact of lockdown on principals, who were often the central liaison and coordinator of vital support services for the school and whānau. A resounding response to the question of what could be done to further support principals was that time to recuperate and recover from the stresses of leading their schools through a pandemic was essential.

All principals and leaders suggested that agencies need to work more effectively together to alleviate disparities and provide greater support to whānau and their communities. They all note that these inequities have progressively become worse with each lockdown and impact directly on student learning.



Transitions

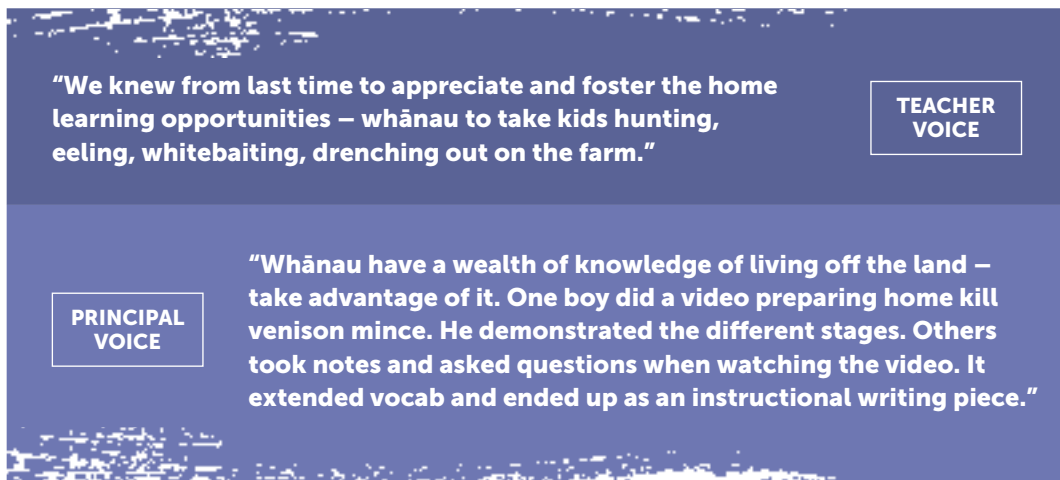
Generally, schools were better prepared for lockdowns in 2021. Schools had learnt valuable lessons from 2020 and were able to transition in and out of lockdowns with less disruption to students, staff and whānau. Schools were able to successfully organise their staff, students and whānau with short notice.

Transitions to online learning

Almost all schools used the first few days of lockdown to prepare and distribute hard packs and devices. Schools used either contactless collection or delivery as a way to deliver devices and hard packs to students who required them. There were examples of schools providing internet access to whānau to enable connectivity for learning and communication. In some regions, iwi approached schools directly and provided additional support for iwi members.



All primary schools understood the unique challenges that young learners face when participating in distance learning and they modified their programmes accordingly. All primary schools included a diverse range of activities for younger learners such as whānau-based activities, outdoor adventures, gardening and cooking.



For most primary schools it was about encouraging whānau to balance schoolwork with other activities and maintain a holistic focus for learners.



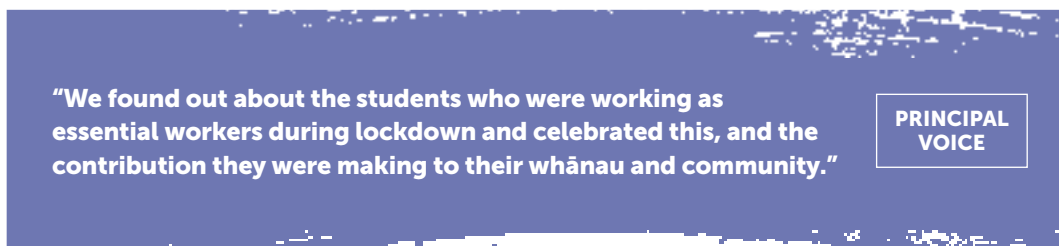
Most schools found creative ways to keep students and whānau engaged online.



They found ways to run school cross countries while maintaining whānau bubbles and MoH guidelines in the community. Students were able to submit photos and times to the school via online portals. Schools were innovative in finding ways to celebrate students and learning through online tools.

For the majority of secondary schools there was a smooth transition to online learning and many classes continued as normal. Most secondary schools modified their timetables to suit student needs and behaviour patterns of teenagers. Most schools developed a greater focus on supporting Māori student learning during lockdowns with more frequent monitoring and check ins by Deans, mentors and kaitiaki.

One trend, seen mainly in Auckland schools, was of high school students working as essential workers and trying to manage their studies around employment. Schools were able to support these students through creative measures and keep them engaged in education.



Leaders in isolated rural schools experienced additional challenges due to location and they too were innovative and creative in finding appropriate solutions.

Transitions back to kura

At the time of this research, Auckland and parts of Waikato remained in lockdown at Level 3. This part of the report focuses on the transition of students from Level 3 back to Level 2 and the experiences of seven of the 14 kura. Principals reported that the transition of students back to kura was smoother than the previous lockdowns. Almost all principals and teachers recognised a need to modify programmes to allow for students to reconnect, socialise and re-engage in onsite learning programmes.

“Big whānau day at the beach when we came out of lockdown. Whānau saw whānau, and saw their own struggles. We celebrated that we actually survived and set up activities to collaborate. Beach activities and lots of whānau fun.”

WHĀNAU
VOICE

Most schools made changes to the timetable to cater for this. Few schools skipped the whakawhanaungatanga stage and launched immediately into learning.

Schools followed health measures put in place by the MoH and some adapted to suit the needs of their communities. Schools that had students return at Level 3 used bubbles of 5-10 students to minimise risk. Schools ensured bubbles were self-sufficient with their own equipment, facilities and resources. At Level 2, most schools had an engagement strategy which encouraged students to return swiftly to school and re-engage in onsite learning programmes.

All schools performed deep cleans of all facilities prior to students returning to school and adopted a rigorous hygiene regime. This aligned to MoH guidelines for preparing for students return to school post-lockdown.

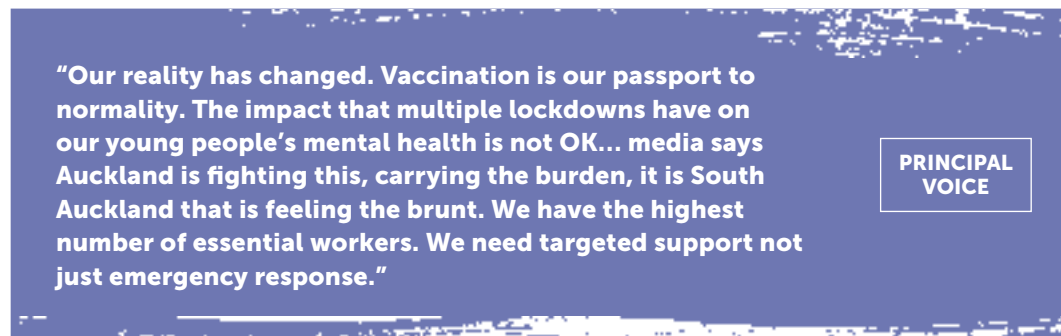
Schools put creative measures in place to support staff and student wellbeing such as creating staff retreat spaces, appreciation gifts and counselling. Schools placed a greater emphasis on manaakitanga and wellbeing when students and staff returned.

For some secondary schools, their trades academies were unable to run which caused a large gap for seniors in some schools. Schools were often creative and found solutions in the community to support these learners.

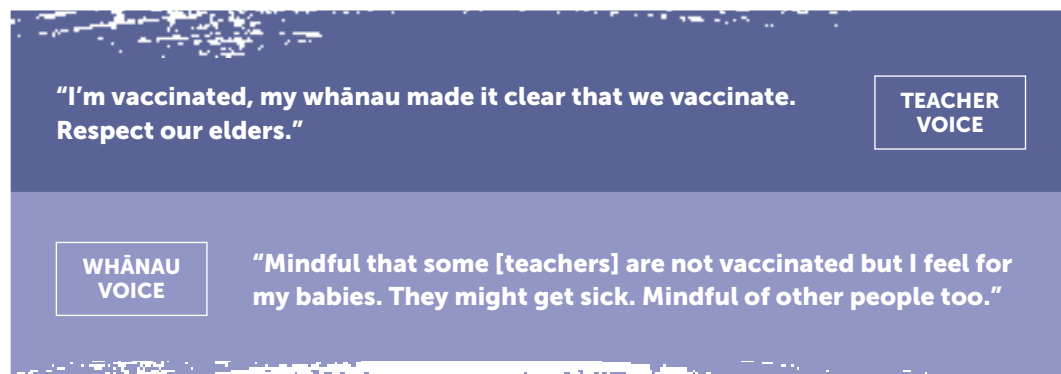
For younger learners and their schools, not having whānau onsite presented varied challenges but communities and schools found solutions as they moved forward.

Mandatory Vaccinations

ERO spoke with school leaders and trustees as the mandate was being implemented. It was a time of great change for schools and their communities. Most schools commented on the emerging journey their school communities were on. All principals and trustees were steadfast in their commitment to protecting tamariki. Most schools in Auckland see vaccination as a pathway towards normality.



While most kaiako supported vaccination targets, a very small number were wary of the mandate and did not want to be vaccinated at the time of this research. While principals were non-negotiable about the government mandate there was a focus on moving forward in a way where mana was protected.



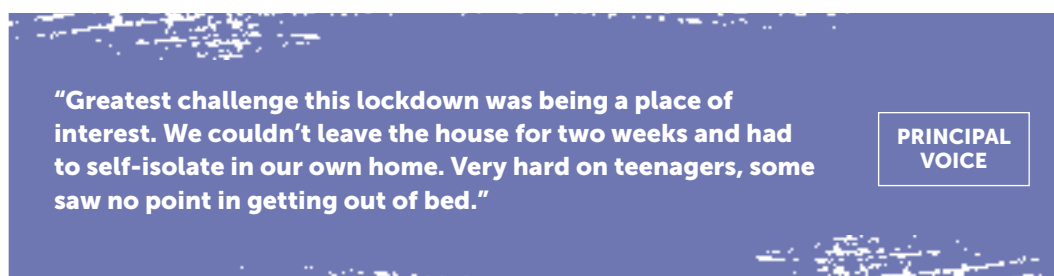
Generally, tumuaki supported the kura as a whole becoming vaccinated – including kaimahi and students aged 12 years and older. Most secondary schools had made good progress towards national targets for vaccination rates. In a majority of secondary schools, they promoted the [IRA.DOT](#) campaign for rangatahi which was a rangatahi-led campaign that encourages people to get ‘dotted’ from COVID-19³.

3. Retrieved from: <https://www.unitec.ac.nz/about-us/get-ya-dot-at-ira-dot-gotyadot-6-and-7-november-2021>

Ngā kitenga me ngā āheinga anamata Insights and future opportunities

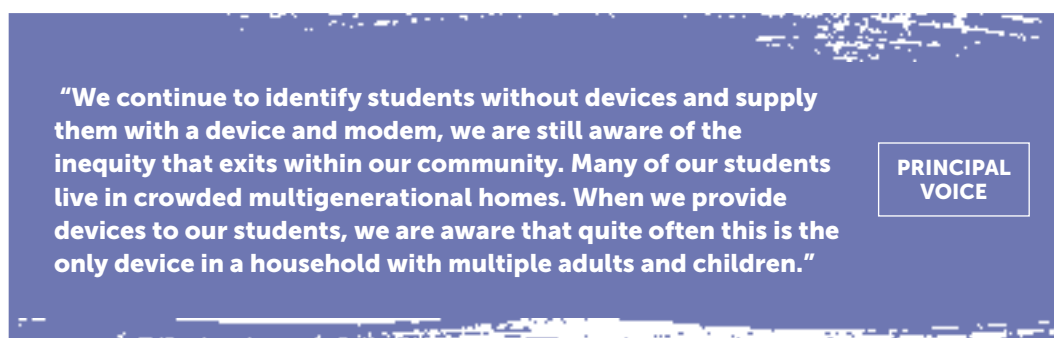
ERO's insights show that school leaders acknowledge COVID-19 is here to stay, and all principals, trustees and leaders have very clear ideas about what this means for the future.

Most principals believe they are ready to return to lockdown as required and understand how to prepare for a future of living and learning with COVID-19. Principals understand that learning takes multiple forms. They continue to respond to the needs of students and whānau while thinking creatively about ways to support learner success in the 'new norm'. Some schools in Auckland found it challenging when the virus hit their communities:



Principals and leaders ensured that whānau were better prepared for online learning but acknowledged that disparities created through the digital divide have widened since March 2020.

Most schools in this research provided resources predominantly through their own, or iwi funding. Very few schools reported that the MoE funded or provided devices and internet connectivity. Although some schools have made progress with devices and internet connectivity through MoE support, there are still a small number of students and whānau who do not have access to either. Most school principals echoed sentiments such as:



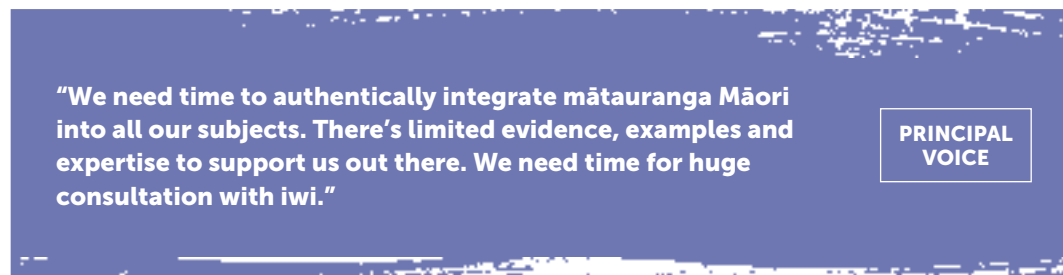
Interview responses indicated that teacher training providers need to consider engaging students via online tools and to ensure teacher trainees are adequately prepared for teaching online in the future.

Most schools chose to remain neutral in the vaccination debate and did not have vaccination tents onsite. An interesting finding for a few schools was the adverse community reaction to having pop-up vaccination tent on school grounds.

While schools were generally more positive of the MoE response in 2021, they still identified the need for more funding to support schools with teaching online.

Schools have deepened their understanding of how to utilise NCEA to its full potential and of the flexibility that can be afforded when required. All secondary schools discussed the considerations around external assessments and derived grades with a lack of mock exams across most secondary schools. Most secondary schools suggested a delay in the intended NZQA changes to allow schools to adapt to the 'new norm' of education more fully alongside COVID-19.

In some schools where te reo Māori was taught, there was a lack of digital resource to support learning in this space. Schools acknowledge that deepening their knowledge of te ao Maori and weaving mātauranga Māori into their programmes was a way to authentically engage Māori students and their whānau.



A majority of secondary schools were also exploring their role as Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners and have acknowledged that exploring this will further engage Māori learners and whānau.

Losing whānau during lockdown was traumatic for some whānau and kura. It has been considerably hard to navigate the tangihanga space for whānau when normal rituals and tikanga cannot be followed.

All schools acknowledged that the series of lockdowns over the past 17 months have enabled students to further develop their key competencies and become more effective self-directed learners.

Whakarāpopoto

Summary

The past 17 months have demonstrated the resilience, determination and strength of English-medium schools to overcome the numerous challenges of the pandemic, and the compounding social inequities affecting their most vulnerable whānau.

By the lockdowns of 2021, schools were prepared and accustomed for the challenges of operating through lockdown. For most schools, online learning had become a regular feature of the classroom programme and teachers and students were more confident navigating a digital curriculum. Schools were adept at finding ways to incorporate learning into the day-to-day activities of the home which strengthened whānau engagement, particularly for younger students.

Challenges facing older students were unique, with some juggling the stresses of employment as essential workers alongside a lack of peer contact and preparing for exams. Schools acknowledged that priorities for those working during lockdown had shifted and took creative measures to support those students to stay engaged with learning.

The re-emergence of COVID-19 in 2021 brought the inequities facing Māori students into sharp focus once more, with many whānau struggling with the omnipresent 'digital divide' and to meet the basic needs of their household.

Principals had to lean heavily on their school's own resources, local iwi, support services and community networks to ensure learners and whānau had the essentials to be able to learn from home. This included getting families kai packs, household necessities, devices and internet connectivity. Most schools continue to be concerned about the impact of COVID-19 and the importance of vaccinating their most at-risk whānau.

All schools have proven their self-reliance and ability to quickly respond and adapt to the needs of learners and their whānau, with a distinct and widespread focus on maintaining wellbeing. Wellbeing of staff was also a priority and most schools ensured kaiako were able to focus on the needs of their family before working with students.

At all stages of lockdown, including the transition back to school, schools focused on giving students time to reconnect with their peers and to settle back into learning at a comfortable pace. This was balanced with following MoH health measures and maintaining school bubbles where needed to minimise risk and reassure students and whānau.

Principals and trustees identified the following supports required to better meet the needs of their learners when living with the challenges of COVID-19. These include:

- a strategic pandemic plan which provides for living with COVID-19
- ensuring tikanga and mātauranga Māori are embedded and visible in their schools
- providing more professional development and learning for teachers
- provision of funding for schools to better support online distance learning when required
- providing students and whānau with the necessities for future lockdowns – day to day necessities such as kai, devices and internet connectivity.

ERO noted the need to address social issues and inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and find ways to reduce the disparities these create.



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