

# COMPASS:

## Whānau partnerships with school— patterns and associations with Māori students' learning

### Executive summary

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The COMPASS project is part of NZCER's Te Pae Tawhiti Government Grant Programme of Research, funded through the Ministry of Education. It is also aligned to the broad goals and aspirations of NZCER, in that its overarching purpose is to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the notion of Whakatere Tōmua—Wayfinding.

This research project analyses a subsample of data from a project led by Professor Melinda Webber entitled *Kia tū rangatira ai: Living, thriving and succeeding in education*. The original project investigated how ākonga learn, succeed, and thrive at school, with a large number of ākonga ( $n = 18,996$ ), whānau ( $n = 6,949$ ), and kaiako ( $n = 1,866$ ) respondents from 102 schools across Aotearoa New Zealand. This fourth COMPASS report describes the seventh NZCER study, utilising a quantitative exploratory study design, to focus on the views and experiences of the 1,665 whānau of Māori learners. We focus on three key areas: whānau engagement; whānau perceptions of children's school engagement and enjoyment; and intrinsic, extrinsic, and whānau motivation.

The whānau of Māori children who completed the surveys were predominantly from the Bay of Plenty, Waikato, and Te Tai Tokerau regions. Through a cluster analysis technique, we analysed their survey responses to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways do whānau of Māori children view their involvement with/in school, their child's motivations to attend school, and their engagement patterns?
2. Do whānau views and perspectives of the above differ in relation to whānau reported achievement, career aspirations, and support networks?

Specifically, six clusters were identified, conceptualised, and labelled. Of the 1,665 whānau of Māori children in the study, 43% were identified in active partnerships with schools (Clusters 1–2), whereas 4% were identified in passive partnerships (Cluster 3), and 53% in inactive partnerships (Clusters 4–6).

Overall, we found a spectrum of whānau perceptions of their children's school joy, as well as whānau engagement with, and motivation towards, education. Clusters 1 and 2 are likely to represent what a strong or active home–school partnership looks like, characterised by high levels of whānau engagement and positive perceptions of the school environment for their child, indicating a strong alignment between whānau values and school practices.

Cluster 3 comprises a small number of whānau and shows low extrinsic motivation, above-average levels of intrinsic motivation, and slightly above-average levels of children enjoying school. We suggest that whānau in this cluster have mixed perceptions about the value of schooling but generally employ a passive approach to their role as school partners.

Clusters 4–6 exhibit varying degrees of disengagement and uncertainty, reflecting a whānau lack of motivation towards schooling more generally and possible dissatisfaction with their interactions (past and present) in the educational system. These clusters tell us about the risks associated with inactive home–school partnerships, and what whānau in those situations might be thinking and experiencing.

Broadly speaking, across the findings, we found that whānau in the inactive partnership clusters (i.e., Clusters 4–6) demonstrated the least favourable reported outcomes, whereas those in the active or passive partnership clusters demonstrated more favourable ones.

Our study revealed nuanced differences in how whānau of Māori children view their children's learning, engagement, and motivation. There were varied perspectives and experiences expressed, and our results indicate that these are likely to shape the extent to which they (and their children) act as partners and navigators in the education journey.

There are likely numerous positive outcomes from strengthening school–whānau partnerships—particularly when whānau expertise, knowledge, and experiences are intrinsically linked to classroom learning. The findings of this study propose that Māori students, whānau, teachers, and schools benefit when whānau actively partner with schools to enhance the educational content, conditions, and contexts that enable Māori student learning.

Importantly, this study emphasises the critical role of school enjoyment and motivation to whānau engagement in education. It is hoped that this study will help schools to reconceptualise whānau partnerships as a product of the overall wellbeing and mana-enhancing ethos of the school context.

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