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

Mohamed Alansari, Melinda Webber, and Mengnan Li

TE WĀHANGA
HE WHĀNAU MĀTAU HE WHĀNAU ORA
NZCER

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He ihirangi | Contents

He mihi | Acknowledgements

The COMPASS[1] project is a partnership between Rangahau Mātauranga o Aotearoa | New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) and Professor Melinda Webber from Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland. COMPASS is part of NZCER's Te Pae Tawhiti Government Grant programme of research, funded through the Ministry of Education. We would like to thank all the whānau who completed our surveys and allowed us to share their experiences and perspectives in this report. Our thanks also go to the project sponsor Sheridan McKinley who provided critical feedback and support from the project's inception through to its completion, and to Heleen Visser for her careful review of the report.

1 Conceptualising Māori and Pasifika aspirations and striving for success (COMPASS), see project page: https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/projects/COMPASS.

Karakia

Poua ki uta	*Make fast onshore*
Poua ki tai	*Make fast at sea*
He punga whakawhenua	*An anchor that holds me to the land*
He punga kōrewa	*An anchor that holds me in the sea*
Purutia e hika	*Hold fast my companion*
Kia piki ake	*In order that we may rise above*
Ki a Taihoronuku	*The tides that engulf the land*
Ki a Taihororangi	*The tides that engulf the sky*
Ka titiro ake au	*As we cast our eyes upward*
Ki te pae o uta	*Towards the landward horizon*
Ki te pae o waho	*Towards the seaward horizon*
Kia tau ki tuawhenua	*To settle upon the mainland*
Ki te kiri waiwai o Papatūānuku	*And the vitality of Papatūānuku*
E takoto nei	*Lying before me*

FIGURE 1 **Punga (Anchor) by Wi Taepa**

He kupu whakataki | Introduction

Ko mātou tēnei | Positioning statement

Due to the nature and design of the COMPASS project, and similar to our previous COMPASS reports, it was important for each researcher to acknowledge the position they hold within the current study. Guided by kaupapa Māori, and taking into account the purpose of the research, it was considered appropriate that we started by explicitly locating ourselves within the study and the kaupapa under examination. Jones (1992) argued that researchers must organise a space "to reveal themselves legitimately in their work, to include [their] explicit subjective presence in their writing" (p. 25). Similarly, Clothier (1993) argued that Indigenous oral traditions insist that researchers "position yourself, letting the listener/s know from where you come and thereby reminding yourself from whence you came" (p. 10). We therefore share our positionality statements below to contribute to and tautoko the perspectives generously shared by the participants.

Mohamed

I am "a first" in many ways, which shaped how I view myself as a person and as a professional: a first-generation university student; a first-generation immigrant; and a first-generation speaker of English. I was born and raised in Bahrain, by a grandmother, a mother, two sisters, and over 20 aunties. Despite living in Aotearoa New Zealand from a young age, I am Middle Eastern through and through. My culture, language, and heritage shape how I view myself and the world around me: respect and deep appreciation of ancestors who paved the way for me to "do" and "know" what I do and know; generosity and togetherness that shape why we do things; and the belief that one cannot succeed unless their family—immediate, extended, and chosen—succeeds with them. I grew fond of Aotearoa New Zealand because I was able to identify the same values here and see them manifest in everyday life.

I was raised by an extended family that was strict on traditions, protocols, and understanding spaces and places, as well as having a strong appreciation for how our ancestry has paved the way to how we live today. Back where I grew up, knowing and speaking your Indigenous language and dialects, and holding on to your values and ways of being, are held in the highest regard. My upbringing, rooted in strong cultural values and worldviews, gave me and my siblings the confidence to be who we are, the strong sense of identity that serves as the backbone of our resilience, as well as our openness to relate to others beyond our own culture through building bridges that connect our worldviews. So, to me, it has always been intuitive to look at the wider influences that shape people's growth, learning, and aspirations.

Attending school, and subsequently university, in New Zealand as a foreign student was challenging and at times intimidating. I moved here alone and did not speak but a few words of English. None of my classmates at the time knew where Bahrain was, or that it was even a country. No one spoke or looked like me, nor did I speak or look like anyone in most of my classes. Yet, I was expected to attend, to engage, to learn, and to keep coming back for more. I remember having 6 months to learn English, but 2 months to sit a physics exam to get UE credits. Somehow, with lots of help from teachers who believed in me, I managed.

I think back to those nights where I almost gave up and wanted to go home, and why I never had the guts to do that, and it almost always boiled down to one thing: the desire to make my family proud, and to show them that their love and support of me have taken us all to a place beyond imagination. Indeed, I am one privileged individual to have that as my backbone. It is therefore not surprising that my research interests are now focused on learning environments, motivation, and engagement, and what we could do differently to create positive and inclusive educational experiences for students—hopefully better than the ones I had.

As a mixed-methods researcher with a stronger focus on quantitative methods, my mission is to use quantitative methodologies to showcase strengths-based, positive stories about some of the most prominent enablers to student success and wellbeing. The COMPASS project allowed me to do just that: combing through the survey data, looking for the most promising insights, beliefs, and practices needed to re-think schooling for a more equitable educational experience for Māori learners. I am grateful to have partnered up with Melinda and Mengnan on this project, as we navigate through the data as research collaborators, colleagues, and friends.

Melinda

I am a daughter of Te Tai Tokerau through my mother and Rotorua through my father, and a mokopuna of Ireland through my maternal grandmother, and Scotland through my paternal grandmother. I am an uri (descendant) of Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Hine, Ngāti Hau, and Ngāti Whakaue. I was raised by whānau collectives who were loving, nurturing, clever, and hardworking. However, I was also raised with whānau who had been underserved and diminished through their engagement in our education system. School was not a place where their innate mana, strengths, interests, and aspirations were acknowledged or nurtured. They had their Māori names mispronounced or changed, their knowledge systems and culture minimised, and left school believing that they were "not smart enough".

Growing up I cannot remember any of my whānau attending a parent–teacher meeting or getting involved in school-related activities. I attended multiple schools growing up (more than 10) and none of them sought out opportunities to integrate the knowledge and skills of my whānau into the classroom. And they should have! My koro was a mathematician and my father an amazing musician. My mother is gifted in her ability to silently entice the quietest and shyest children into her sphere of aroha. Both of my grandmothers were prolific readers who encouraged my love of books. One of my grandmothers regularly sent my daughter letters that contained the most fantastical and funny stories; she could have been a children's author. The point of this kōrero is to emphasise that many whānau Māori members are skilled, knowledgeable, and role models for tamariki (see Alansari et al., 2022). But many schools underestimate, underutilise, and undervalue what they can contribute. This *must* change. *All* whānau Māori want their tamariki to be successful at school. *Most* will contribute where they see they can. *Many* wish schools would tell them exactly what they need to do to help their tamariki learn. *None of them* want schools to think they don't care about the education of their tamariki. Consequently, this study is important because it amplifies the pivotal role of whānau Māori involvement in shaping the learning behaviours and engagement of tamariki at school and gives us some insight into what facilitates their involvement in educational spaces. Tukua tēnei rangahau ki te ao!

Mengnan

Growing up as an "only daughter" in Shanghai, China, I was profoundly influenced by my parents' unwavering support and the values they instilled in me. My name, Meng, meaning "dream", and Nan, symbolising a type of plant renowned for its resilience, beautifully capture my parents' deep hope for me to embody both strength and softness, to harmoniously balance firmness and flexibility as I navigate life's journey. My father, a dedicated judge, exemplifies meticulous attention to detail and a strong work ethic, instilling in me the importance of diligence and precision. Meanwhile, my mother, with her gentle and nurturing nature, is not only a supportive figure but also a close friend. Her encouragement and belief in my dreams are crucial in helping me pursue my aspirations. Their combined influence provided a solid foundation for my academic and professional pursuits. This personal background has driven my interest in exploring how parental involvement and family values impact students' educational experiences and success.

Before diving into research, I spent several years teaching high school students. Being a homeroom teacher gave me firsthand insight into the critical role that parental involvement plays in students' academic success and overall engagement. My academic journey then took me from Shanghai to the UK for my Master's degree, and eventually to New Zealand, where I completed my PhD. Working with my lovely supervisor, Professor Christine Rubie-Davies, was a pivotal part of this journey. Her mentorship was invaluable, and she became like family to me, particularly as I navigated the challenges of completing my studies during the pandemic, unable to return to my home country. This period tested my resilience and strengthened my connection to New Zealand and its education system.

These combined experiences—as an only child, student, teacher, and researcher—have profoundly shaped my approach to studying how parental involvement influences educational outcomes. My mixed-methods research enables me to incorporate the diverse insights I've gained from both my personal background and professional experiences. I'm passionate about understanding and improving how family dynamics contribute to student success, and I look forward to sharing these insights to make a positive impact in the field of education.

He kupu mō te kaupapa | About the COMPASS project

COMPASS is 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. Whakatere Tōmua utilises the concepts of wayfinding, the voyaging spirit, navigation, and waka, as a means of better understanding the ways ākonga Māori successfully navigate their way through the schooling system, maintaining positive motivation, academic efficacy and engagement, cultural connectedness, and high aspirations for the future. The overall concept of wayfinding or navigation can be understood through the lens of the following whakataukī:

He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka

A choppy sea can be navigated

Through kaupapa Māori-informed wānanga and tīkanga, the wider COMPASS project has examined the ways kaiako, ākonga, and whānau navigate educational experiences and contexts. In a sense, this project has sought to identify the various punga (anchors) in the lives of ākonga Māori (for previous publications, see Alansari et al., 2022; Bright & Webber, 2024; Tuifagalele et al., 2024).

In our previous COMPASS studies, we found that ākonga behaviour at school is crucially influenced by punga such as whānau engagement, kura and kaiako support systems, cultural efficacy and belonging, and broader community contributions. Ākonga Māori are wayfinders who do not navigate choppy seas on their own—they instead work alongside whānau, kaiako, and other role models to reach new horizons. The current study focuses on the role of whānau perspectives and experiences in shaping their children's journey through education.

He kupu mō tēnei rangahau | The current study

The first COMPASS report (Alansari et al., 2022), which contained four separate but related studies, laid the foundation for the current COMPASS (fourth) report (and its seventh study of the project). In the first COMPASS report, we have established that high levels of engagement and motivation reported by Māori learners were strongly related to their educational and wellbeing outcomes[2] (measured by self-reported achievement, support networks, and cultural pride). The three follow-up qualitative studies in that report highlighted what students and teachers believed to be factors critical in creating supportive learning environments, which were characterised by high levels of motivation to learn, strong engagement, and, ultimately, success-oriented learning experiences. The second and third COMPASS reports explored deeper into what the above factors might look like in practice, specifically through the voices and experiences of whānau (Bright & Webber, 2024; Tuifagalele et al., 2024). The current and fourth COMPASS report similarly focuses on family perspectives, but through a quantitative analysis of the survey data.

Although the existing literature has already established strong ties between student motivational patterns, engagement, and associated outcomes, few studies have focused on the engagement and motivation of Māori students, and through the eyes of their whānau. Also, large-scale quantitative studies that solely focused on the views of Māori learners and their whānau (i.e., not compared against their New Zealand European counterparts) are limited. As argued in this report and in our previous publications, the strength of this project lies in its unique ability to explore what whānau of Māori students perceive as important or crucial to their success, without diluting such views through comparing them with views of students from Western or historically dominant groups.

The current COMPASS study focuses on the views and experiences of the whānau of Māori learners, in three key areas (whānau engagement; whānau perceptions of children's school engagement and enjoyment; intrinsic, extrinsic, and whānau motivation). We provide an overview of the three areas with relevant literature, prior to describing how we captured and analysed the survey data.

It is important to note that, in this study, various whānau members with parental responsibilities completed the survey, including grandparents, aunties, uncles, and other important caregivers. Therefore, in this report we use the term "whānau" to encompass all survey respondents with parental responsibilities.

2 In the study, we operationalised cultural pride and support networks as important components of wellbeing for Māori and Pasifika learners, but we suggest that future studies expand on this by investigating a wider range of wellbeing factors and explore how these can collectively enhance wellbeing.

1. Whānau engagement in schooling

Research into parental involvement and engagement has highlighted the significant role of family contexts in influencing student engagement, both directly and indirectly through parental beliefs and expectations (Reschly & Christenson, 2019). Parental behaviours, such as monitoring progress and active involvement, have been identified as essential for supporting and enhancing students' engagement with their education (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013; Wilder, 2014). Key aspects such as parental knowledge of school activities, effective communication with teachers, and support for autonomy were found to be linked to increased student engagement and better academic outcomes (Im et al., 2016). Furthermore, parental autonomy support and a focus on mastery goals contributed to higher engagement, persistence, intrinsic motivation, and academic achievement (Reschly & Christenson, 2019).

Previous research has also highlighted the influence of whānau and cultural values on children's success motivations. Rubie-Davies et al. (2018) contended that attention to positive learning-focused relationships with Māori students' whānau and community can be powerful, particularly if schools invited the participation and decision-making and teaching activities related to the children's learning. These authors also argued that schools must cultivate a climate in which whānau feel comfortable to initiate involvement in their children's education and should provide them with the appropriate opportunities to do so. Webber et al. (2021) found that, for Ngāpuhi secondary students in New Zealand, whānau role models and cultural values were crucial in guiding their educational choices. These students admired role models who embodied tenacity, ambition, and self-determination—traits mirrored in their tūpuna. Similar findings were echoed by Park and colleagues (2024), who compared success beliefs and wellbeing among Korean youth located in New Zealand and abroad and found that cultural norms—likely emphasised by parents—were highly influential to how Korean children viewed their success beliefs and motivation to learn. These findings highlighted the pivotal role of family culture and parental involvement in shaping children's learning behaviours. Understanding how whānau engage with their Māori children's education and how this engagement interacts with Māori cultural values is therefore crucial.

It is worth noting that some of the literature uses parental "involvement" and "engagement" interchangeably—as we have in this report—whereas other literature argued that the two terms may be conceptualised differently albeit operationalised similarly. As a result, we use the term "whānau engagement" in this report as an umbrella term encompassing both constructs.

2. Whānau perceptions of their children's school engagement and enjoyment

Another factor explored in this study is whānau perspectives on their children's school engagement—a multifaceted construct that includes affective/emotional, behavioural, and cognitive aspects (Reschly & Christenson, 2022). Behavioural engagement pertains to students' actions and participation in school activities, emotional engagement involves their emotional responses to school and learning enjoyment, and cognitive engagement reflects the mental effort invested in learning.

Research showed that school engagement improved academic performance, promoted school attendance, and reduced risky behaviours (Lippman & Rivers, 2008). Despite previous underestimation of its importance, fostering school engagement has now been recognised as vital for enhancing academic motivation and success (Bosnjak et al., 2017; Chodkiewicz & Boyle, 2016; Fredricks et al., 2004). Therefore, understanding whānau perspectives of their Māori child's engagement, and how their perceptions relate to other factors, is likely crucial for improving educational strategies and support mechanisms.

3. Intrinsic, extrinsic, and whānau motivation

Motivation in education can be intrinsic, extrinsic, or influenced by whānau values, and individuals often experience different motivations simultaneously (Reschly & Christenson, 2022). This study explored how whānau perceive their Māori children's motivations for school, noting that these perceptions often mirror their own motivations. Madjar et al. (2016) investigated the impact of parental attitudes on children's motivation toward homework. They discovered that, when parents emphasised mastery goals, such as deep learning and self-improvement, it was positively associated with children's own mastery orientations. In contrast, a focus on performance goals, like competing with peers or avoiding negative evaluations, was linked to children's performance-approach and performance-avoidance orientations, with these effects mediated by how children perceived their parents' goals.

Intrinsic motivation has been found to be linked to positive attitudes towards learning (Wigfield et al., 2012), greater persistence (Miller et al., 2020), enhanced metacognitive processing (Hoyle & Dent, 2018), and better wellbeing (Park et al., 2024). Conversely, findings on extrinsic motivation's impact on achievement were mixed, with some studies suggesting negative effects (Lee et al., 2016) and others indicating positive correlations (Senko, 2019). Whānau motivation, such as the desire to make one's whānau proud, is also crucial for student success (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020).

Webber and Macfarlane (2020) identified five key components essential for Māori student success, framed by the Māori concept of mana (authority, pride, belonging, and purpose). The Mana Model included the concepts of mana whānau (connectedness to others and collective agency); mana ūkaipō (belonging and relationship to place); mana motuhake (positive self-concept and embedded achievement); mana tū (social–psychological competence); and mana tangatarua (a diverse knowledge base and skill set). In the model above, Webber (2024) suggested that mana whānau must be satisfied before students can focus on the other mana types, indicating that feeling connected and valued by others in their social milieu is both foundational and crucial for achieving broader educational and personal goals.

Overall, given the significant impact of whānau engagement, school engagement, and motivation on student achievement, and how those factors can be related to whānau and cultural backgrounds, we pursued this study focusing on whānau views and experiences across the three areas above. Investigating the interplays between whānau perceptions of their child's engagement, their child's school enjoyment, and their intrinsic, extrinsic, and whānau motivations can provide valuable insights. This research has the potential to advance our understanding of how Māori cultural values and whānau dynamics influence Māori student engagement and achievement. It also has the potential to identify different groups of whānau with varied views, experiences, and understandings of the role of schooling in shaping Māori children's learning experiences and outcomes.

He tukanga | Method

Design and approach

The subsample used for this project was taken from a national research project led by Professor Melinda Webber entitled *Kia tū rangatira ai: Living, thriving and succeeding in education*. The project was funded by a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship, administered by The Royal Society Te Apārangi.

Kia tū rangatira ai adhered to ethical principles and practices, including informed consent, protection of vulnerable students, anonymity, and confidentiality as outlined by kaupapa Māori protocols (Smith, 1997, 2005) and received ethics approval (UAHPEC Approval Number: 021775) in 2018. A kaupapa Māori approach to the project ensured a respectful, culturally responsive, and appropriate pathway was used for undertaking this important work alongside school communities. Teachers and school leaders were involved in the gathering of the data, liaison with students and whānau, and included in the analysis and interpretation of school-level findings.

The broader strengths-based research 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. For this quantitative exploratory study, the focus is on the perspectives of the 1,665 whānau of Māori children who completed the surveys, and were predominantly from the Bay of Plenty, Waikato, and Te Tai Tokerau regions.

Research questions

Through a cluster analysis technique, we sought 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?

Participants

This report provides an analysis based on the views of 1,665 parents and whānau of tamariki Māori. Almost a quarter (24%) of the total number of whānau who responded to the survey (1,665 of 6,949 respondents) identified their child as being Māori. Most of these respondents (92%) identified Māori as their child's main ethnic group, and almost all (96%) named the hapū or iwi groups their child belonged to.[3] Geographically, the participants were predominantly from the Bay of Plenty (45.2%), followed by Waikato (20.7%), and Tai Tokerau (15.2%). In terms of the educational levels of their children, 69.2% were enrolled in primary schools (Years 0–6), 19.6% in intermediate schools (Years 7–8), and 11.1% in secondary schools (Years 9–13).

3 The survey did not collect ethnicity data about whānau so we cannot definitively say what proportion of these adults identify as Māori. However, the responses to open-ended questions suggest that a high proportion of whānau were themselves Māori.

In terms of decile, 52.8% of whānau of tamariki Māori indicated their child was in low-decile schools, 41.8% in mid-decile schools, and 5.4% in high-decile schools.[4]

All whānau completed a survey that included both closed and open-ended questions. As presented below, the closed items in the survey were designed to assess five distinct factors (one related to school enjoyment, one related to whānau involvement and engagement, and three related to motivation). For the purpose of this study, whānau involvement and engagement have been termed "whānau engagement" as an umbrella term.

Data collection instrument

Kia tū rangatira ai employed surveys to gather quantitative and qualitative data from parents and whānau over a 2-year period. The survey comprised a combination of 27 open-ended and closed questions. Whānau of tamariki at primary school or secondary school were asked to provide demographic data about their tamariki and then complete multiple-choice questions, Likert scale items, and open-ended questions.

All measures were administered via online or print surveys during school hours. All substantive factors, excluding sociodemographic and the open-ended qualitative items, were measured on a 1–5 Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true), with a rating of 3 reflecting a slightly positive position (somewhat true) on any given item. Table 1 summarises the major variables investigated in the study along with their definitions.

The survey also collected three whānau reported measures that we used in the study as outcome variables: overall achievement; career aspirations; and support networks.

TABLE 1 **Summary of factors investigated in the study with definitions and examples**

Factor	Definition	Example statements/ questions	N of items
School joy	Whānau perceptions of the extent to which their children enjoy school (including enjoying learning at school, going to school, and other behavioural measures).	"When we work on schoolwork together, my child seems interested and engaged."	5
Whānau engagement	Whānau perceptions of their own involvement and engagement in/with their children's learning, and the extent to which they encourage them to learn.	"I want my child to do well in school."	5
Whānau motivation	Whānau perception of whether going to school is important for whānau reasons (e.g., giving back to whānau, making whānau proud).	"To make their family/ whānau proud."	5
Intrinsic motivation	Whānau perception of whether going to school is important for their child's intrinsic reasons (e.g., for their own growth and satisfaction)	"Because they experience pleasure and satisfaction from learning new things."	5
Extrinsic motivation	Whānau perception of whether going to school is important for extrinsic reasons (e.g., getting a job, living the good life, salaries/wages).	"In order to have a better salary later on."	5

4 The survey was rolled out before the school decile rating was replaced with the Equity Index.

Data analysis

Preliminary checks of the data were conducted to ensure reliability and validity prior to the main analyses. Given some survey items were developed for the study and others were modified to suit the New Zealand schooling context, an exploratory factor analysis (including Cronbach's alpha and Pearson's *r* coefficient) was necessary to investigate potential underlying patterns in whānau responses. This was then followed by hierarchical cluster analysis to identify groups of whānau with similar patterns of responses to the engagement and motivation bank of questions.

Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis technique was used to identify patterns in whānau engagement and motivation, using similar procedures to those described by Alansari and colleagues (2013; see also Watson et al., 2020). A number of cluster solutions were evaluated and these were cross-validated using another clustering technique (i.e., *k*-means clustering method) to ensure the findings were replicable, identifying interpretable and theory-driven clusters, and consequently choosing the most theory-congruent number of interpretable clusters. Cluster analysis is a technique commonly used to classify participants' responses into interpretable profiles, and is analogous to factor analysis (i.e., factor analysis groups variables, whereas cluster analysis groups people). Once all factor scores were created in this study, they were converted to *z*-scores (with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1), to enable cross-cluster comparisons. Once interpretable clusters were identified from the analysis, they were examined alongside the literature and relative to each other and were labelled based on patterns of whānau responses within them.

Chi-square tests, *F*-tests, and associated *p*-values were used to detect statistically significant differences that were not due to chance, whereas partial eta-squared was used as a measure of effect size to check whether the magnitude of differences was practically significant or meaningful (0.01, 0.06, and 0.14 denote small, moderate, and large effects respectively). Throughout the Findings section, we use the term "statistically significant" to denote results from an inferential statistics test where $p < .05$. All quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS v27. We were guided by Pallant (2013) and Field (2013) when deciding on appropriate statistical techniques to organise, code, and analyse the data.

He kitenga | Findings

Preliminary results (descriptives)

Tables 2 and 3 present the descriptive statistics for the major study variables, and the relations between them. As shown in Table 3, we found statistically significant associations between all factors. The strongest associations were between whānau motivation and extrinsic motivation (r = .71), followed by whānau motivation and intrinsic motivation (r = .55). In other words, to whānau, it is likely that they saw these distinct types of motivation as strongly and positively interrelated.

TABLE 2 **Descriptive statistics for major variables in the whānau dataset**

	Range	M (SD)	α
School joy	1–5	4.22 (.71)	.71
Whānau engagement	1–5	4.73 (.44)	.83
Whānau motivation	1–5	3.83 (.92)	.88
Intrinsic motivation	1–5	4.35 (.64)	.77
Extrinsic motivation	1–5	4.00 (.86)	.82

Notes: Skewness and kurtosis were inspected, and we found no violations to normality assumptions. Two items were removed during the factor analysis, otherwise suggesting strong factorial structure for the above factors.

TABLE 3 **Correlations[5] between major variables in the whānau dataset**

	1	2	3	4	5
1. School joy	1				
2. Whānau engagement	.30**	1			
3. Whānau motivation	.30**	.35**	1		
4. Intrinsic motivation	.49**	.37**	.55**	1	
5. Extrinsic motivation	.20**	.35**	.71**	.44**	1

Note: **p < .001

5 Pearson's r correlation coefficients are used to interpret the strength of the association between two variables, such that .10–.29 is a weak association, .30–.49 is moderate, and .50–1 is strong (Pallant, 2013).

Whānau views and perspectives: Clustering survey responses

Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis technique was used to identify patterns in whānau survey responses. Specifically, six clusters were identified, conceptualised, and labelled. We used the same conceptual definitions and label descriptors throughout the study when similar clusters were found. The clustering was conducted using the five main factors: school joy; whānau engagement; whānau motivation; intrinsic motivation; and extrinsic motivation.

Where possible, we included a narrative that introduces each of the clusters, and used our knowledge of the literature alongside respondents' qualitative data (e.g., see Bright & Webber, 2024) to delve into what might explain some of the highlighting features of each cluster. We also categorised the six clusters into three groups based on whānau reported levels of engagement with school, and whether they thought their child enjoyed school. We theorised Clusters 1 and 2 to comprise whānau in *active partnerships* with schools, Cluster 3 to comprise whānau in *passive partnerships* with schools, and Clusters 4–6 to comprise those in *inactive partnerships* with schools.

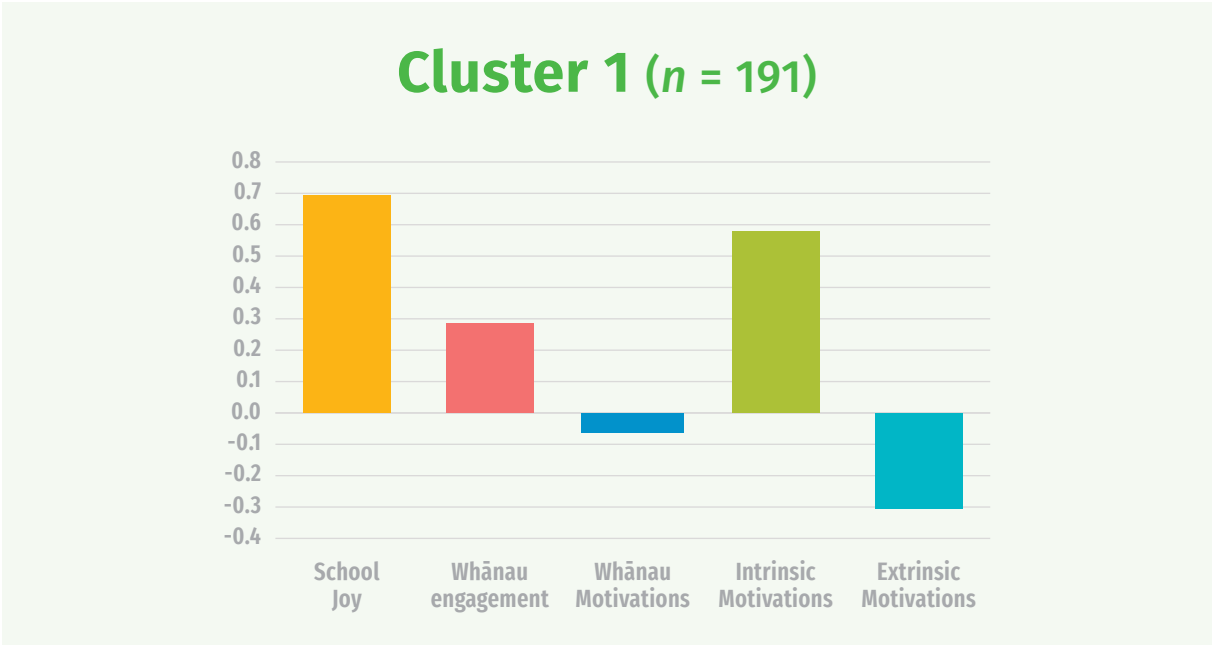
Active partnerships

Cluster 1 (*n* = 191): This cluster consists of whānau who reported relatively high levels of whānau engagement, and the whānau who reported high levels of school joy. These whānau appear to have a positive focus on intrinsic motivation regarding the importance of education and reported within-average levels of whānau motivation.

In this cluster, whānau viewed schooling as intrinsically valuable and integral to their child's growth and success, which they saw as reflective of the whānau overall success. Their high levels of reported engagement in their child's learning suggests a deep involvement in their child's educational experience, potentially influenced by their children's enjoyment of school.

It is possible that these whānau are likely associated with schools that provide regular updates about children's learning, actively invite and encourage whānau participation, and consistently communicate the importance of education for their children's futures.

FIGURE 2 **Cluster 1**

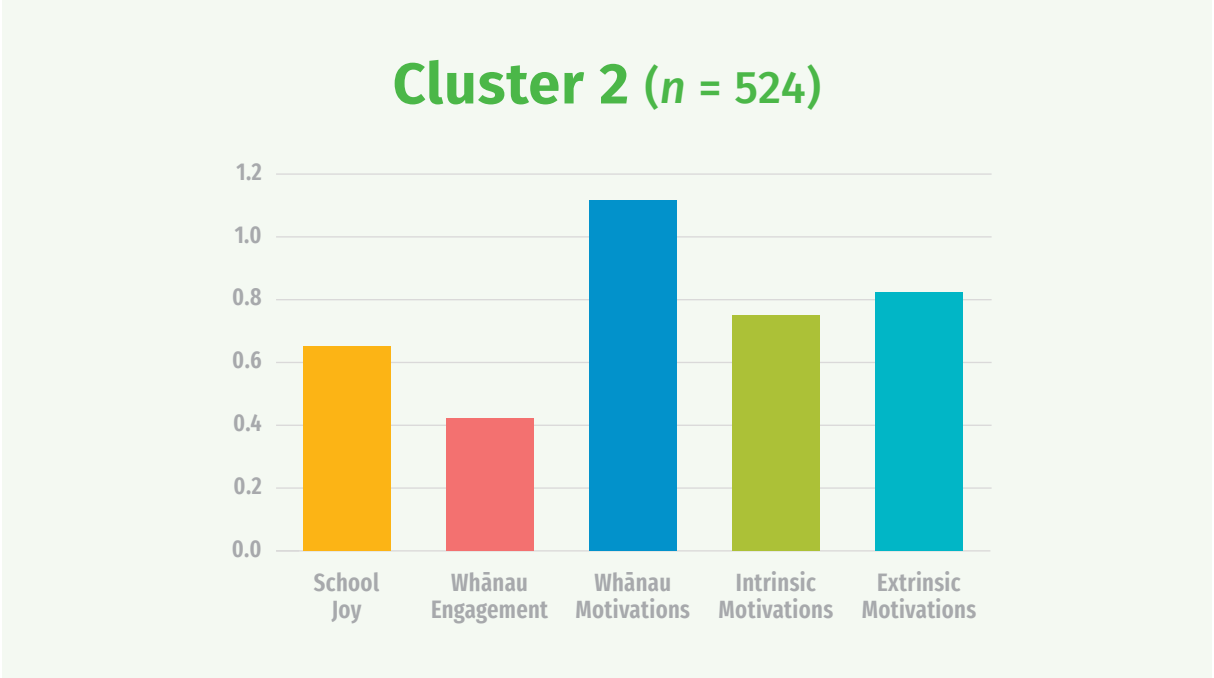


Cluster 2 (*n* = 524): This cluster is the largest of the six and consists of whānau who reported the highest levels of whānau motivation, alongside strong intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These whānau also reported above-average levels of involvement in their children's education and high levels of their children enjoying school.

Characterised as "high on everything, highest on whānau motivation", this cluster is notably engaged and values-oriented. The high whānau motivation and the positive association with their children enjoying school suggests that these whānau perceive the educational experience as closely aligned with their cultural values and aspirations for their children. This indicates that they are likely very satisfied with their children's education, viewing it as significant both personally and for their children's future.

We speculate that whānau in this cluster may be associated with school communities that emphasise te ao Māori values, engage in culturally sustaining practices, and maintain strong partnerships with Māori. Alternatively, these whānau might be involved in Catholic or special character schools where distinct values are deeply integrated into the educational environment.

FIGURE 3 **Cluster 2**



Passive partnerships

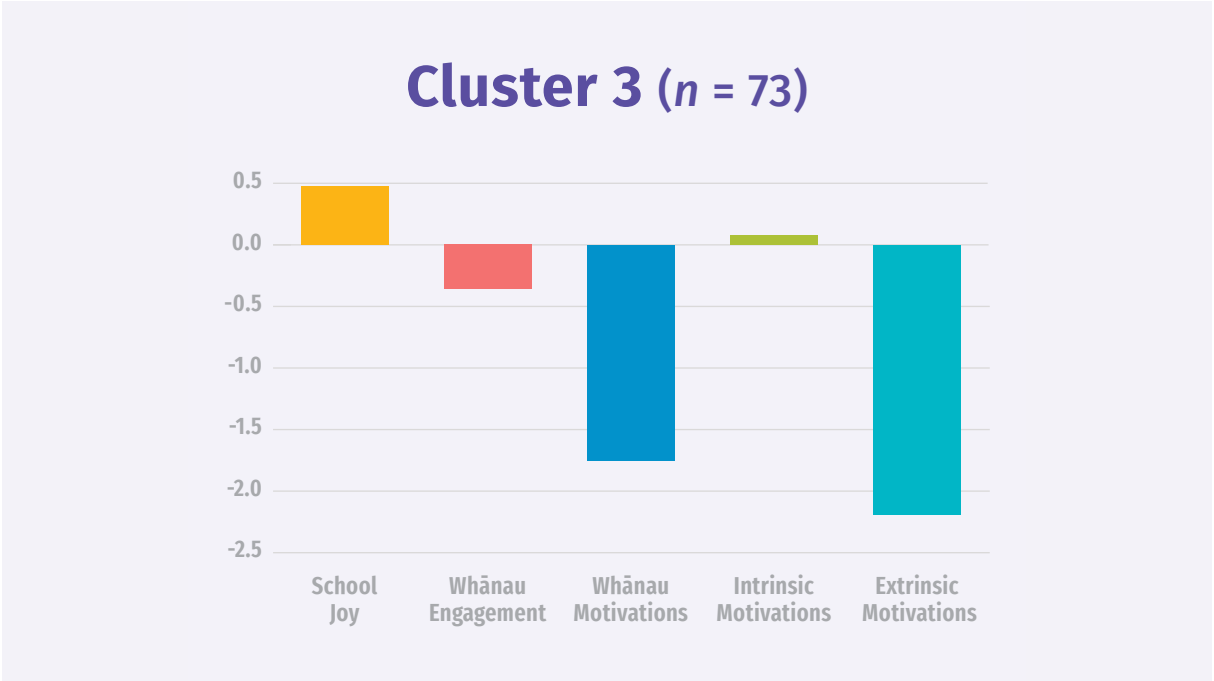
Cluster 3 (*n* = 73): This cluster is considerably smaller and consists of whānau who reported the lowest levels of whānau and extrinsic motivation compared to those in other clusters. Whānau in this cluster reported average levels of intrinsic motivation, slightly above average levels of their children enjoying school, and slightly below average whānau engagement.

Whānau in this cluster have lower levels of engagement and are more passive in terms of their involvement in schooling. This may reflect that whānau in this cluster place a lower value on school activities and have a more limited understanding of the conditions required for children's learning. Despite this pattern, whānau in this cluster engage with their child's education, as evidenced by them reporting that their children enjoy going to school. This suggests that, while they may not be fully engaged in the broader purpose of schooling, they recognise its benefits for their child's growth.

It is possible that this passiveness stems from a lack of alignment between the school's messaging and the whānau values and aspirations. This cluster may be associated with schools that may not sufficiently support aspects related to Māori language, culture, and identity, potentially negatively impacting their perceptions of the overall school climate and whānau engagement.

Overall, this cluster reflects a mixed level of engagement and motivation that might be influenced by schools' misalignment with whānau values and the broader educational experience.

FIGURE 4 **Cluster 3**



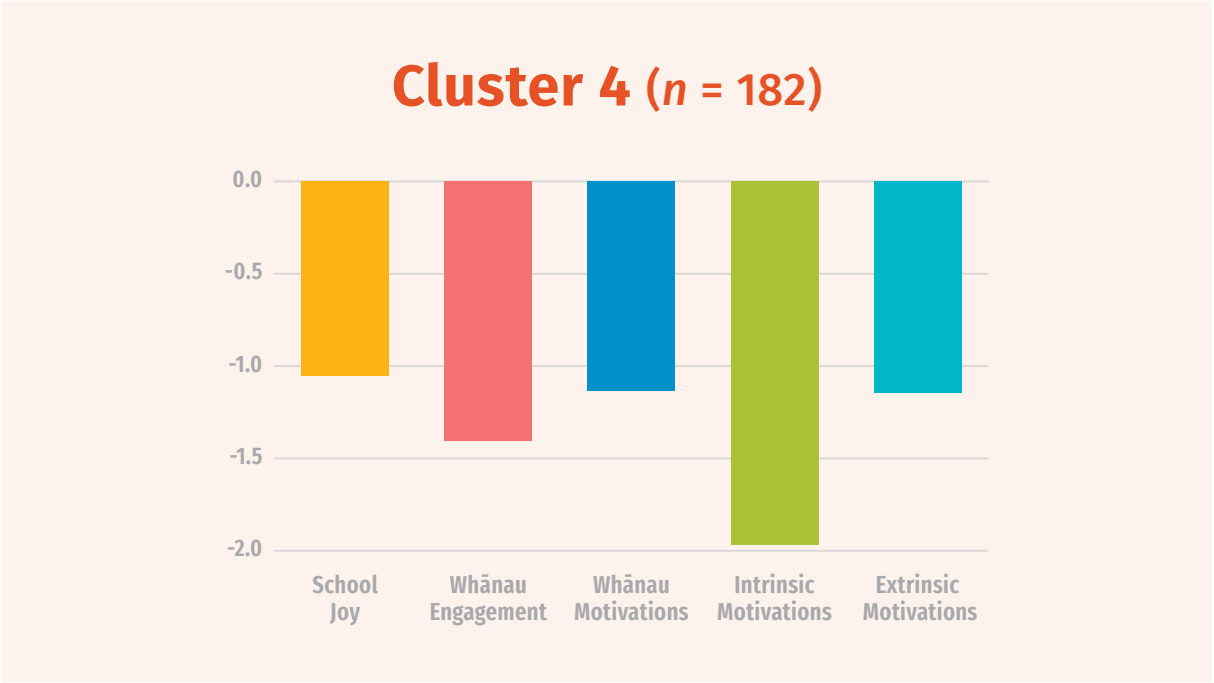
Inactive partnerships

Cluster 4 (*n* = 182): This cluster includes whānau who reported the lowest levels across all five measures: whānau motivation; intrinsic motivation; extrinsic motivation; whānau engagement; and school joy.

This cluster is characterised by a significant level of disengagement. Whānau in this group likely view the school's values, processes, and practices as completely misaligned with their own educational priorities for their children. This misalignment could explain their minimal involvement in schooling activities. Furthermore, their children's joy with school is markedly low.

It is possible that whānau in this cluster are associated with schools that do not adequately support Māori learners or encourage whānau involvement, or are significantly behind other schools in developing strategies to do so. These whānau may have had negative interactions with these schools, which could include experiencing or witnessing racist or discriminatory behaviour. This may contribute to their overall negative perception and disengagement from the educational process.

FIGURE 5 **Cluster 4**



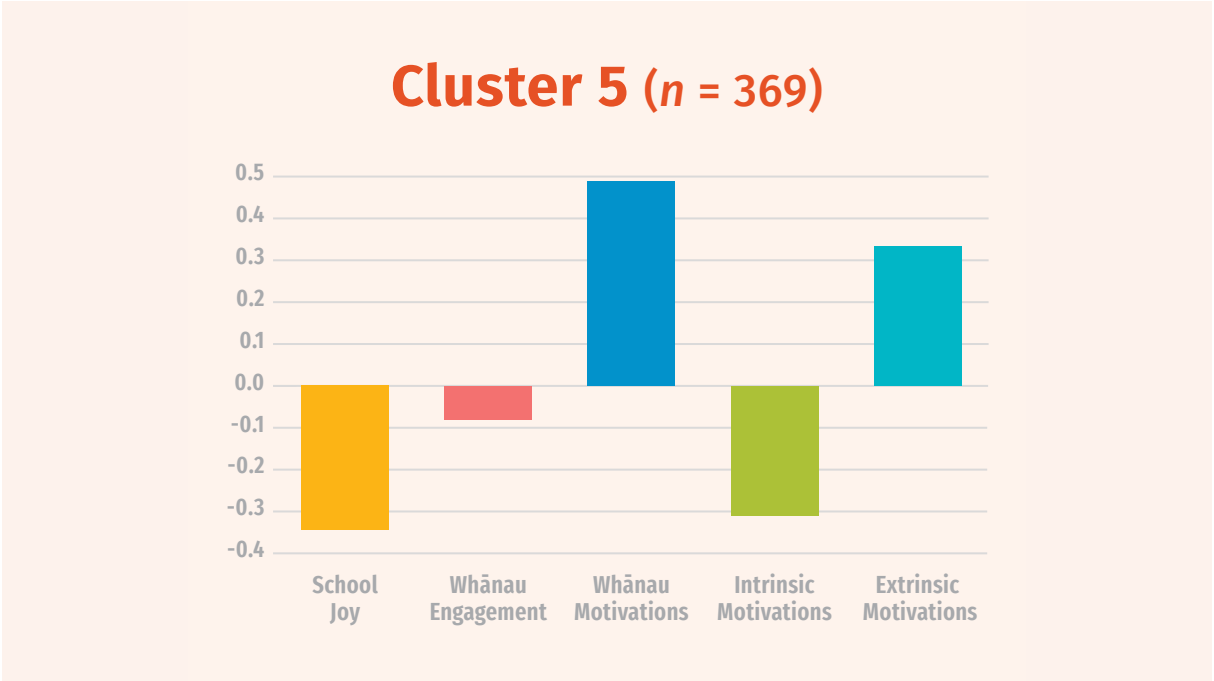
Cluster 5 (*n* = 369): This cluster comprises whānau who reported above average levels of whānau and extrinsic motivation, but below average intrinsic motivation. Whānau in this cluster reported slightly below average levels of whānau engagement and below average levels of their children enjoying school.

The data suggest that whānau in this cluster view the primary purpose of schooling as a means for their children to secure employment and achieve financial stability, given the above average levels of reported extrinsic motivation and below average levels of school enjoyment. Consequently, whānau in this cluster may not see their role in providing academic support as crucial. Instead, these whānau might focus on offering personal or out-of-school support, emphasising academic outcomes over intrinsic academic engagement.

It is also possible that whānau in this cluster place a strong emphasis on the economic value and long-term outcomes of education. They might expect their children's schools to enable a swift transition into the job market in order to achieve financial security. This perspective could influence whānau level and type of engagement with the academic aspects of their children's education.

Overall, this cluster reflects a pragmatic approach to education, prioritising long-term economic outcomes and career readiness while exhibiting lower levels of intrinsic motivation and whānau engagement.

FIGURE 6 **Cluster 5**



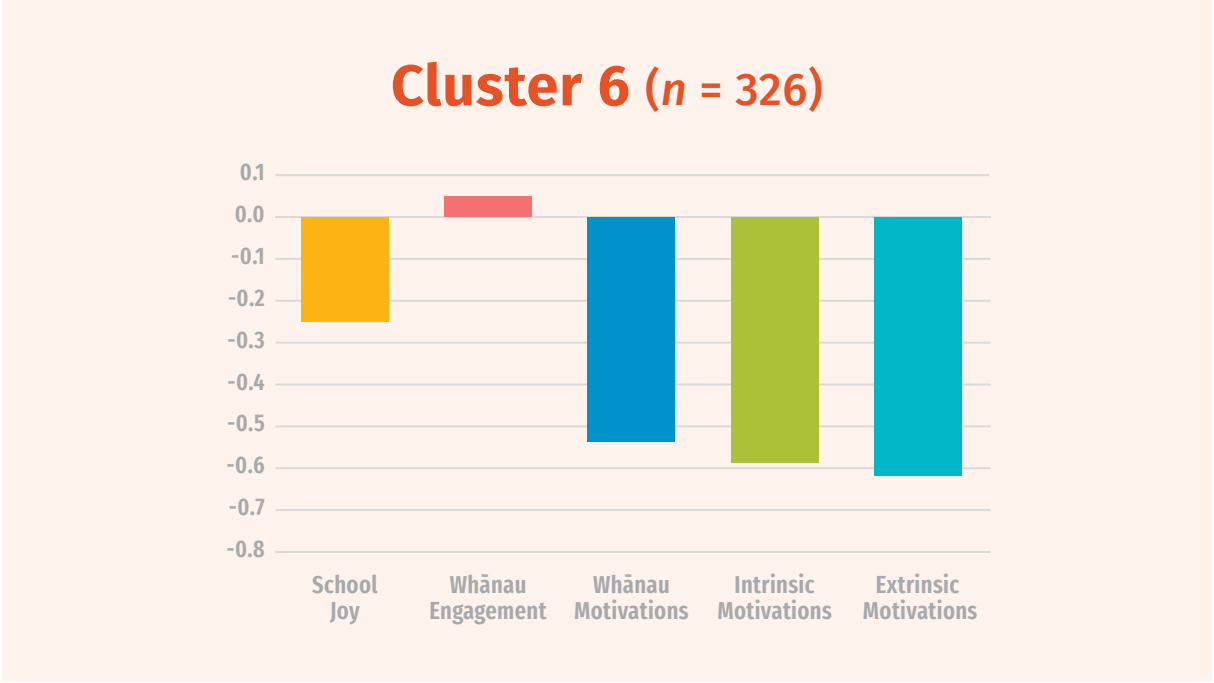
Cluster 6 (*n* = 326): This cluster is characterised by whānau who reported below average levels of whānau, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation. Despite these low motivation levels, whānau reported within average levels of their children enjoying school, with within average levels of whānau engagement.

Whānau in this cluster may struggle to perceive the value or relevance of the schooling system. They exhibit low motivation across all dimensions, which suggests a lack of strong belief in the educational system's benefits for their tamariki. Nevertheless, they continue to support their children's education as they maintain a level of involvement with school. This indicates a level of tolerance and persistence, despite their own uncertainties about the system's efficacy.

It is likely that these whānau feel a sense of dissatisfaction with the school's ability to meet their expectations or to provide adequate support. This dissatisfaction could stem from a perceived disconnect between their expectations and what the school delivers. In contrast to Cluster 4, which demonstrates explicit dissatisfaction with the schooling system, Cluster 6 is marked by uncertainty and low expectations. This uncertainty may arise from a lack of clear understanding about the school's purpose and how it aligns with their own educational values and needs.

Overall, this cluster reflects a group of whānau who are unsure about the educational system's value but who still maintain some level of support for their children's schooling experience. Their engagement appears to be driven more by a sense of obligation rather than a strong belief in the system's benefits.

FIGURE 7 **Cluster 6**



Overall, the analysis of these clusters reveals a spectrum of whānau perceptions of their children's school joy, as well as whānau engagement with, and motivation towards, education (see Figure 8).

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).

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, indicating a strong alignment between whānau values and school practices.

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.

Whereas Cluster 5 demonstrates high extrinsic motivation but low intrinsic motivation, with whānau focusing on practical outcomes such as qualification attainment and career readiness, Cluster 3 shows low extrinsic motivation and above average levels of intrinsic motivation, suggesting whānau have mixed perceptions about the value of schooling but generally employ a passive approach to their role as school partners.

FIGURE 8 **Summary of the six clusters**

Differences in cluster outcomes

In addition to the cluster analysis, we explored whether there are statistically significant differences in cluster outcomes, measured by whānau reported achievement, career aspirations, and support networks. These are reported next. It is worth noting that, broadly speaking, across the findings below, we found that whānau in the inactive partnership clusters (i.e., clusters 4–6) demonstrated the least favourable outcomes, whereas those in the active or passive partnership clusters demonstrated more favourable ones (see Table 4).

TABLE 4 **Cluster differences on achievement and wellbeing outcomes (means and standard deviations)**

	Active partnerships		**Passive partnerships**	**Inactive partnerships**		
	Cluster 1 (*n* = 191)	**Cluster 2 (*n* = 524)**	**Cluster 3 (*n* = 73)**	**Cluster 4 (*n* = 182)**	**Cluster 5 (*n* = 369)**	**Cluster 6 (*n* = 326)**
Whānau-reported achievement	3.55 (0.78)	3.43 (0.8)	3.68 (0.8)	3.11 (0.73)	3.22 (0.69)	3.27 (0.71)
Career pathway	2.63 (0.74)	2.7 (0.68)	2.64 (0.76)	2.18 (0.91)	2.59 (0.75)	2.61 (0.74)
Support network	1.35 (0.75)	1.34 (0.77)	1.44 (0.87)	1.18 (0.72)	1.27 (0.75)	1.22 (0.77)

Whānau-reported achievement

The analysis of whānau reports of their children's achievement levels reveals that Cluster 3 (passive involvement) had the highest reported achievement levels, followed by Clusters 1 and 2 (active involvement). In contrast, Clusters 4–6 (inactive involvement) show lower perceptions of achievement. While there were no statistically significant differences in achievement among Clusters 1–3, significant differences were observed between the top three clusters (Clusters 1–3) and the bottom three (Clusters 4–6).

A noteworthy observation is that school joy was consistently above average in Clusters 1–3, while it was below average in Clusters 4–6. This pattern suggests that higher levels of school joy are likely to be associated with better perception of achievement outcomes. Thus, school joy may serve as a potential predictor of higher achievement, highlighting its importance in fostering academic success.

Career aspirations

The analysis of career aspirations suggests only one statistically significant difference: whānau in Cluster 4 (inactive involvement) reported significantly lower career aspirations for their children compared to those in the other five clusters.

Importantly, Cluster 4 is distinctive because it is the only cluster where all five variables are reported as below average (school joy, whānau engagement, whānau motivation, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation). This pattern of consistently low scores across all variables may reflect a general disengagement or dissatisfaction with the education system. Again, the lack of alignment between the school environment and whānau expectations or values could contribute to the lower career aspirations reported for their children in this cluster.

Support networks

We asked whānau to indicate who provided support for, and cared about, their child's success, both in and out of school, and analysed the number of listed people in the child's support networks.

There were no statistically significant differences in clusters by support network. However, we did note that the non-significant patterns still resemble those found when analysing cluster differences by achievement. That is, Clusters 1–3 (i.e., those in active or passive home–school partnerships) reported slightly higher levels of support networks than those in Clusters 4–6 (i.e., those in inactive home–school partnerships), with Cluster 4 reporting the least amount of support networks for their children. However, these differences were not statistically significant, possibly due to the limited range of responses (e.g., listing only 1–3 people), which may have reduced the ability to detect statistically significant differences.

He matapaki | Discussion

In this study, we examined the nature of whānau involvement in schooling as measured by their engagement with the educational processes, experiences, and worlds of their Māori children. There are 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 whānau (and their children) see themselves as partners and navigators in the education journey.

Whānau who are active participants in their children's schooling

Whānau in the *active partnerships* groups (*n* = 715, 43%) believed that their children benefited both personally and educationally from being at school and they are more likely to ensure they attended regularly and turned up ready to learn. It is likely that whānau in the *active partnerships* clusters saw schools as a place where their children could intrinsically develop mana motuhake (positive self-concept and a sense of embedded achievement) and mana tū (social–psychological competence and confidence). These characteristics are critical because student academic efficacy and confidence are important indicators of student engagement in learning and belonging at school (Baumeister, 2012). Also, a high sense of academic self-efficacy increases a student's readiness to invest effort in their learning, encourages them to persist when facing academic challenges, and helps them to cope with academic failure and/or negative feedback (DiBennedetto & Schunk, 2018). A higher sense of academic self-efficacy is likely influenced by culturally responsive teaching, including the ways in which teachers foster positive relationships with students and their whānau and get to know their students better. In turn, this allows teachers to use the insights gained to tailor their feedback in line with students' needs, strengths, and aspirations. Research has shown that students who receive detailed feedback from their teachers not only report higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, but they can also achieve substantially better than those who receive no feedback (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018).

Some of the whānau in the *active partnerships* Cluster 2 also reported high levels of whānau and extrinsic motivation. This indicates that they believed their children develop mana whānau at school (feelings of connectedness and appreciation by others at school) and valued the benefits of a good education. As such, the whānau in the *active partnerships* cluster are more likely to perceive alignment between their child's school and their own cultural values, aspirations, and educational outcomes.

Schools that establish partnerships and encourage *active partnerships* are more likely to provide whānau with regular updates about children's learning and help whānau to see how they can play a role in supporting their child towards educational success (Webber et al., 2018). Schools that enable high levels of whānau engagement demonstrate a commitment to Māori values, language, and participation in decision making and work hard to ensure their classroom, leadership, and governance practices are culturally responsive and sustaining (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018). It is likely that teachers and leaders in these schools work hard to de-privatise their educational spaces and decolonise/indigenise their curriculum offerings so they are relevant and meaningful for Māori students and their whānau (Highfield et al., 2023).

School environments can foster the academic self-efficacy, social–psychological competence, and confidence of Māori students by making sure their whānau know that educational success is increased when their children can identify positive role models in their life and talk about the ways those role models have navigated adversity, utilised their strengths, worked in ways that are "manaful", and positively transformed the lives of others around them (Webber, 2024). Whānau who seek active partnerships with their children's schools feel equipped and motivated to help their children succeed at school and have a determination and sense of purpose to do so.

Whānau who are passive participants in their children's schooling

The small number of whānau who comprised the *passive partnerships* group (*n* = 73, 4%) had slightly above average perceptions that their children enjoyed school and believed that they benefited from going to school. Student enjoyment of school is important because it can positively impact student attendance, student sense of belonging and safety, and student commitment to learning (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018). When whānau perceive that their children are happy at school and achieving well they are more likely themselves to spend time in the school context participating in school-organised activities and attending school events. Student joy and satisfaction at school means that the school context is considered a welcoming and positive space for whānau involvement in learning and teaching too. As such, schools can increase the engagement of passive whānau by ensuring they have an accurate gauge of the hopes and aspirations of the whānau regarding their child's education and post-secondary school ambitions.

Whānau in the *passive partnerships* cluster appeared ambivalent about involving themselves in their children's activities and learning because they were unclear about the links between what was being learnt at school and the lives of their children outside the school gates. However, as evidenced by their mixed levels of engagement in school activities, whānau understood that their presence at school impacted their children's motivation and satisfaction with learning and motivation to succeed. Teachers can help whānau in this cluster to become more involved in their children's school lives by communicating that there is value in the learning process rather than focusing solely on the outcomes of learning. Additionally, Māori students and their whānau must come to believe that they are both capable and that their inherent strengths and knowledge systems (including their cultural knowledge, language, and beliefs) are valued by the school and can be drawn upon in a variety of contexts to enhance their children's learning (Webber, 2024). Active whānau engagement in schools is critical because "students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development" (Epstein & Sanders, 2006, p. 87).

Whānau who are inactive participants in their children's schooling

More than half of the whānau in this study were in the *inactive partnerships* group (*n* = 877, 53%). The whānau in the three clusters that comprise this grouping were largely disengaged from their child's schooling and uninvolved in school-based activities. There appeared to be three reasons why whānau in this group are inactive in terms of their involvement in school activities. Firstly, it is likely that some of the whānau felt unwelcome and uncomfortable in the school context and consequently avoided it at all costs. It is possible that these whānau had experienced or witnessed negative, racist, or discriminatory interactions at school in the past. Alansari et al. (2020) have argued that both Māori students and their whānau perceive racism as a regular feature of their school lives which negatively affects their wellbeing, participation, and educational outcomes. There is a need for

schools to discuss the best ways to address the issue of racism. Blank et al. (2016) have suggested that mitigating the impact of racism requires teachers to first understand their own biases and then act to diminish their impact on decision making and interactions with students.

Secondly, some of the whānau may not know how to provide meaningful academic support for their children at home. To that end, they remained largely uninvolved in the day-to-day learning of their children. Alton-Lee et al. (2009) examined the impact of whānau involvement on Māori student achievement and found that certain kinds of school and whānau connections and interventions can have large positive effects on the academic and social outcomes of Māori students. Examples of connections that made the largest positive difference were joint whānau/school interventions such as teacher-designed interactive homework sessions with whānau and the incorporation of whānau and community funds of knowledge into curriculum. School–whānau partnerships should focus on building whānau capacity to support their children's learning at home while simultaneously recognising them as the experts on their own children (Hall et al., 2015).

Thirdly, some of the whānau may be disengaged because they felt dissatisfied with the schools' low expectations for their children. These whānau might feel that they are constantly battling the school to better meet the needs of their children. There has been a long history of deficit theorising by teachers in relation to Māori student achievement, driven by stereotyping and low teacher expectations (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Consequently, schools and "teachers that are serious about accelerating the learning of Māori students must understand that the critical lever for positive change is authentic whānau–school relationships" (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018, p. 226). Schools must actively work to counter negative societal stereotypes about Māori that position them as lower achievers and academically disengaged. But, in order to do this, they must first foster a climate where whānau feel comfortable to initiate involvement in their children's education and where they are provided with meaningful opportunities to do so. The expectations that schools and teachers communicate to Māori students and their whānau can be an important motivating factor on their engagement (Hynds et al., 2017). Whānau are highly attuned to both overt and covert messages from schools and teachers regarding high versus low expectations for their child's success.

Whānau in Cluster 4 did not perceive that their children enjoyed school or benefited from schooling in ways that they recognised. It is likely that these whānau avoided participating in their children's school lives or did not know how to involve themselves in ways that felt safe and mana-enhancing. Given that participants in *inactive partnerships* Cluster 4 reported the lowest levels across all five measures in the study, it is likely that this group of whānau do not experience the school context as a place that they belong to. Nor is it likely a place where they believe they can contribute to in any meaningful way. To this end, it is important for schools to change whānau perceptions.

At the heart of this cluster's lack of involvement in their children's education is the perception that their children do not enjoy school. It is likely they believe that their children do not have a strong sense of academic self-efficacy or confidence. When students do not believe they are good learners, their interest in learning diminishes and this lessens their capacity to cope when facing adversity (Webber, 2024). Overall, low academic self-efficacy can undermine a child's determination to succeed and commitment to achieving their goals. It can also undermine whānau involvement in schools.

Whānau in Cluster 5 had a slightly different profile in that, while they did not perceive that their children enjoyed school, they still believed in the promise and outcomes of a good education. It can be presumed that whānau in this cluster were disengaged from their children's schools because they did not fully understand how they could provide academic support to their children. However, given

the whānau belief in the positive outcomes of schooling, it is likely that they still provided personal encouragement and other kinds of support for their children at home. Durie (2006, p. 10) contends that engagement with whānau needs to be constructive and strengths-focused because:

> [f]or many whānau, contact with school only occurs when there is a crisis or a problem, or funds to raise . . . Parents are often placed in a defensive position which all too often leads to a deteriorating relationship with school.

Durie (2006) argued that this "crisis approach to whānau involvement" (p. 10) is demotivating for whānau and discourages their involvement at school. Durie instead argued that "while it is important that parents are kept informed of difficulties, it is more important that parents are also able to work with schools to identify potential and then to jointly construct pathways that will enable promise to be realised" (p. 10).

Whānau in Cluster 6 appeared to struggle to see the value or relevance of schooling to their children's futures. Despite believing that their children have average levels of school enjoyment, whānau in this cluster were more likely to involve themselves in school activities only when they needed to. It is likely that they tended towards minimal involvement because of their dissatisfaction with the ways the school interacted with them. It appears that whānau in this cluster only became involved in their children's school because of a sense of obligation to their child. As such, schools must prioritise engaging whānau in ways that matter to whānau themselves (Hall et al., 2015; Macfarlane, 2004). According to Rubie-Davies et al. (2018, p. 228):

> Māori whānau engagement in schools depends on whānau being treated with dignity and respect, on school and classroom programs adding to whānau practices (not opposing them), on sharing structured and specific home-teaching strategies (rather than general advice), and on supportive group opportunities as well as opportunities for one-to-one involvement in their children's education (especially informal contact).

Finally, whānau aspirations and expectations for their children must be sought, acknowledged, and acted upon, in order for Māori student success and potential to be realised in schools.

He kupu whakakapi | Conclusion

All whānau must be seen as capable of contributing to their children's learning and education. Schools must work harder to ascertain what drives whānau engagement in schooling so that they can purposefully invite them to partner in their children's learning. There are numerous possible 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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