Parental and community involvement in schools -

opportunities and challenges for school change

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New Zealand

Educational reforms of the late 1980s were intended to improve student achievement by increasing parental involvement in schools, making schools more responsive to their local community and making teachers more accountable.

It was believed that these changes would enable schools to be more innovative and more attractive to groups which were missing out, particularly Maori and children from low-income families.

(Wylie, 1999)

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Partnerships

Parents and the community with schools:

[I]   through a governance role with elected school boards being composed mainly of parents; Board of Trustees (BoTs).

Partnerships

➢ BoTs employ teachers and holds the school principal responsible for teacher performance, the effective implementation of the curriculum and for the finances and school property;

➢ BoTs view their key roles as representing parents in school and providing direction for the school;

➢ In practice the main concerns for BoTs are funding, property and managing the school roll.

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Partnerships

The reforms have led to new expectations of schools.

Boards, principals and teachers need to work harder to:

➢ meet the accountability requirements imposed by government; and

➢ be responsible to the expectations of parents and the local community.

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Partnerships

Parents and the community with schools

[II]   as a collaboration with teachers in activities designed to promote learning.

➢   This relationship has given parents a legitimate advocacy role for their children and so for ensuring that schools are responsive to their needs.

Partnerships

Parents and community with schools

➢ Parental satisfaction with quality of education has always been relatively high in NZ.

➢ But the competitive school model has fuelled parental anxiety about education.

➢ This has lead to pressure on schools to promote and market themselves.

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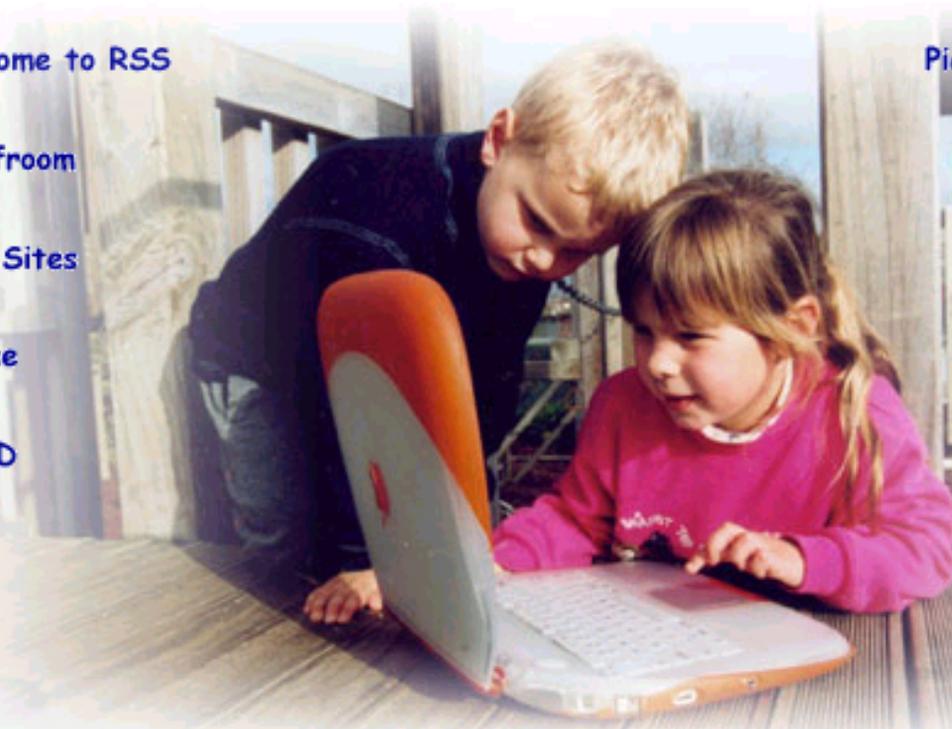
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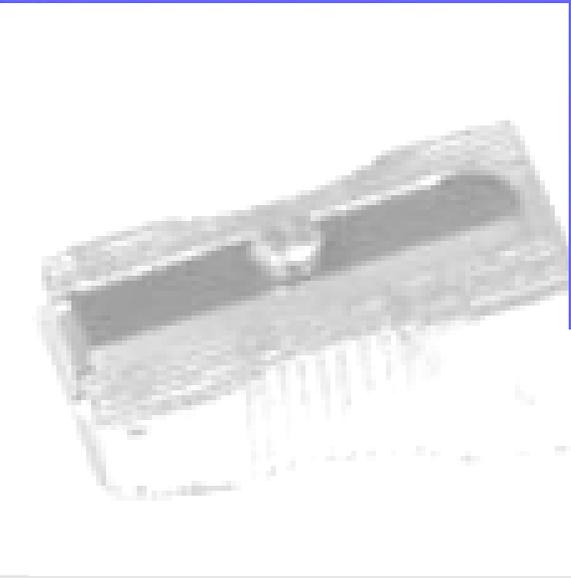
Managing Change

➢ Despite the challenges presented by the reforms there is widespread support for the self-managing school concept and the vast majority of schools prefer the autonomy of self-governance and the greater freedom of decentralisation (Fiske and Ladd, 2000).

➢ While there has been an increased emphasis on school development there is accumulating research evidence to suggest that school based initiatives are insufficient to make substantive change to critical aspects of schooling such as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Wylie, 1999).

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Managing Change

➤ There can be a conflict in initiating change in schools and meeting the needs of parents and the local community.

➤ The parents and local community often advocate for schooling as they experienced it.

➤ This can make it difficult for schools to implement changes that might assist students to be better prepared for a different future or better meet the needs of students who have not been so well served by schools.

Managing Change

➢ Over time there has been a rejection of the 'one size fits all' philosophy of *Tomorrow's Schools* under which all schools were required to stand alone as autonomous units in a competitive environment, regardless of their particular circumstance or coping capacity (Boston, 2000).

➢ Centralised leadership is required to support school change.

Managing Change - new initiatives

➤ Currently, there are a number of centrally driven interventions focused on improving teaching and learning.

➤ A key strategy has been to encourage parental education so that they are indeed able to support the learning of their children.

➤ This focus reflects the research that identifies the impact of rich everyday experiences on learning at school.

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Managing Change – new initiatives

➤ The Government believes that 'the quality of the relationships which schools forge with their students' families and wider communities is critical to raising student achievement'. (MOE, 2001, p.30)

➤ There are also Government-funded programmes designed to improve the knowledge base of parents, such as adult literacy courses and free community access to, and tuition in, Information Communication Technology.

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Developing new schools

➤ The Education Act, (1989) gave communities the right to set up their own state-funded school if the school was one with 'special character'. This may be where 'Te Reo Maori is the principal language of instruction or it can be demonstrated that this school will provide a style of education not currently available in the state system'.

➤ Examples include Catholic Schools, Kura Kaupapa Maori.

➤ Kura Kaupapa Maori are anchored in the community they make with parents – the kura may be distinct from the community but not separated from it. (McKinley, 2000)

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Future challenges for change & innovation

➤ If schools are isolated units there may be changes that address immediate, local concerns and needs but they are unlikely to lead to a rapid 'renewing' of schooling.

➤ Parents, the community and, at times, teachers and principals, can be conservative forces in the face of change.

➤ Significant change cannot occur without parental and community support and their confidence in the leadership offered by the professional educators.

Future challenges for change & innovation

If schools are to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed for their future world we need:

➢ leadership at both the school and national level so that a shared view develops of what schools are aiming to achieve and how this might be different from the past.

➢ and this requires an **active partnership** between schools and their communities.