

School Board leadership: Key issues 2025

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1. Introduction

Background to the survey

This report presents a summary of results from a 2024 survey of School Boards. The survey was designed to assist a range of groups to gain insights into topical issues faced by Boards. Our main aim was to collect data that could inform the content and type of support NZCER provides to school stakeholders. In particular, NZCER plans to use the findings to inform the school professional learning and development (PLD) and advisory support we provide during our current assessment refresh programme.

To design the survey, we partnered with Te Whakarōputanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa—New Zealand School Boards' Association (called Te Whakarōputanga in this report), as they also wanted information to inform their development of support and resources for Boards. We also received assistance from the Kōkirihi Collective to help frame the streaming practices questions.

The survey focused on four areas related to the work of School Boards:

- equity (including streaming practices) in education
- assessment and data use
- student attendance
- climate change.

A final section on areas for development and learning was also included.

For the purposes of this survey, we used the following definition of equity:

Equity does not mean that all students obtain equal education outcomes, but rather that differences in students' outcomes are unrelated to their backgrounds or to economic and social circumstances over which students have no control. (OECD, 2018, p. 18).

Who was the survey sent to, and who responded?

On 12 November 2024, an online survey was sent to School Board presiding members (chairs) and general members using a Te Whakarōputanga contact database. We received 289 valid responses from 259 schools (around 10% of all schools).

Over three-quarters of respondents (between 223 to 227 for each question) replied to the demographic questions. Of those who responded:

- 28% were a Board presiding member (chair) and the rest were general Board members
- most (59%) had been a Board member for between 3 and 10 years. Around one-third (31%) were in their first 2 years on the Board, and 9% had been on a Board for longer than 10 years
- most were female (64%). Fewer were male (33%) or gender diverse (1%).

Nearly all respondents (287) replied to questions about the type or location of their school. Their schools generally reflected the profile of Aotearoa New Zealand schools in that:

- most were primary or contributing (69%), followed by secondary schools (20%). A few schools were intermediate (5%), composite (5%), or specialist (2%)
- most were co-educational (94%)
- they covered the range of regions with the largest number coming from Auckland (26%) and the smallest from Nelson, Tasman, and West Coast (1% each)
- many were located in major or large urban areas (53%). Fewer were located in medium or small urban areas (23%) or rural areas (25%).

See Appendix A for more details about respondents.

Data analysis and reading the report

The survey included a range of fixed-choice questions (e.g., agreement scales and Yes/No answers) and a few open-ended questions. Data from the fixed choice questions were converted into frequency tables. Open-ended comments were analysed thematically. Different numbers of respondents replied to each question. The total number who responded is shown in figures, or in the text. Themes from the open-ended questions are only reported if they were mentioned by around 4% to 5% or more of respondents. A few quotes are included in each of the report sections to highlight themes. Some quotes have been edited slightly to enhance readability.

2. Equity and streaming in education

Introduction to the equity and streaming theme

Equity is a longstanding concern in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. Data show that particular groups of students are not well served by the education system. These groups include ākonga Māori, Pacific learners, students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, and students with extra support needs. As one example, compared with other countries, we have large socioeconomic-related gaps in mathematics performance between students (OECD, 2018).

Key equity focused objectives¹ for School Boards include ensuring that the school:

- supports every student to attain their highest possible standard in educational achievement
- takes all reasonable steps to eliminate racism, stigma, bullying, and any other forms of discrimination within the school
- is inclusive of, and caters for, students with differing needs
- gives effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, streaming (ability grouping in classes or groups) is an equity issue as this practice discriminates against Māori, Pacific, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who are overrepresented in lower streams (Kōkirihi Collective, 2024). Streaming can lead to wider learning gaps between the students who are placed in higher and lower ability groups, often based on factors beyond academic potential like socioeconomic background. One reason for this is that the assessments used to group students can be culturally biased towards Western cultures and ways of thinking (Kōkirihi Collective, 2024).

Streaming is more common in Aotearoa New Zealand than in other countries (Davy, 2021), but is in decline in general. A recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report (OECD, 2023) noted that Aotearoa New Zealand had the second largest decline between 2018 and 2022 in the use of streaming to group students in different classes. Reflecting findings about the damage that streaming can cause, in Aotearoa New Zealand there is a movement towards decreasing streaming practices that is led by the Kōkirihi Collective.

Key findings about equity

There was clear agreement with all three of the statements about equity in the survey suggesting that most respondents were committed to equity in education (see Figure 1). Most agreed or strongly agreed that:

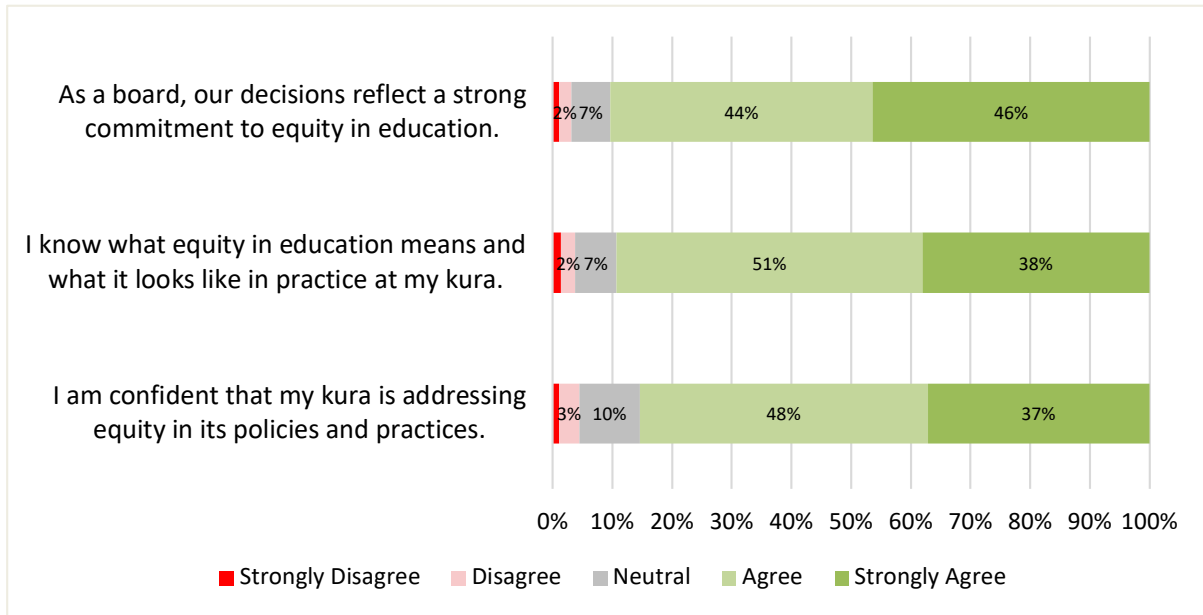
- as a Board, our decisions reflect a strong commitment to equity in education (90%)
- I know what equity in education means and what it looks like in practice at my kura (89%)
- I am confident that my kura is addressing equity in its policies and practices (85%).

¹ Education and Training Act 2020, s.127. https://legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2020/0038/latest/LMS274508.html?search=ta_act_E_ac%40ainf%40anif_an%40bn%40rn_25_a&p=1

Respondents' replies to an open-ended question presented a more nuanced view of their perspectives on equity and suggest Boards and schools have a range of areas that could benefit from more support. The top three were: a need for more funding, resources, and PLD; a need for more focus on community and diversity; and a desire for more focus on student needs.

Survey data about equity

FIGURE 1 Respondents' agreement with equity in education statements (n = 289)



What could be done differently to improve equity?

Almost half of respondents (167; 48%) replied to an open-ended question about equity: “*One thing we could do differently at our school to improve equity would be ...*”. Their replies indicated Board members had differing perspectives on equity, and suggest Boards and schools have a range of areas that could benefit from more support or PLD. Their responses could be grouped into three main themes which are expanded on below:

- a need for more funding, resources, or PLD (40%)
- a need for more focus on community and diversity (30%)
- a desire for more focus on student needs (28%).

An equity focus requires more funding, resources, or PLD

Of those who responded, the most common theme (mentioned by 40%) was the need for more funding, resources, or PLD. Within this wider theme, respondents noted they needed:

- more funding or resourcing in general (17%)
- more staff to assist students (e.g., teacher aides or learning support co-ordinators) (11%)
- greater shared understanding of equity or more PLD for the Board and staff (11%).

Examples of statements related to these themes are presented below:

We would make more of an impact if the Government funded us more adequately and supported our Kura with a Teacher Aide in every class. The Government has spent money to re brand the curriculum yet the need is IN the class. [The Government] needs to support and pay Teacher Aides to boost this curriculum so ALL students get the support they so desperately need. Teacher Aides are second teachers; let's pay them and acknowledge their worth.

Addressing equity requires adequate resourcing, both in terms of money and staffing. We do not have adequate resourcing, as a consequence our ability to deliver equity is compromised.

Ensure the whole BOT [Board of Trustees] and our school community understand what equity is.

More focus on community and diversity is needed

The second common theme was the need for more focus on community and diversity (30%). Within this theme, respondents noted they would like to see:

- improved engagement and collaboration with whānau, their community, or students (16%)
- more focus on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, iwi connections, or culturally responsive approaches (16%)
- a more diverse or quality Board or staff (5%).

Examples of comments relating to these themes included:

For all whānau to be able to have input into improving outcomes/policies and embrace change.

Encouraging MoE [the Ministry of Education] to ensure schools have equitable access to PLD that addresses inequity—particularly around Te Tiriti and cultural responsiveness.

More focus on student needs and diversity is needed

The third theme was a desire for more focus on student needs (28%). Within this broad theme, respondents noted they would like more:

- focus on diversity for all students (9%)
- focus on addressing disadvantage (e.g., costs like uniforms, streaming practices) (8%)
- appropriate assessments, supports, or referrals for individuals (7%)
- focus on addressing absenteeism or behaviour concerns (4%).

Examples of comments relating to these themes included:

... to ensure all students reach their full potential. Some students need an individualised way of teaching ... this needs funding ... which we are constantly struggling, searching and looking for.

As a state integrated school a challenge is when a whānau chose us as the school for their child/ren and willingly agree to pay attendance dues but then don't pay. It creates tension. How can we address this? I am not sure but understanding that circumstances change and we need to support (hand up rather than hand out) where we can.

Have more resources to better address the needs we identify in our at risk students. Better links to external agencies for greater support in areas [where] we are not equipped.

A few Board members are not focused on equity

Two smaller themes included a need for better systems such as forward planning (5%) and statements that indicated that some respondents were not clear about the meaning of equity in education (5%). For example:

Stop putting Māori words in English sentences. It literally has no meaning and is divisive and elitist, EXCLUDING everyone who does not speak BOTH languages.

Key findings about streaming

Responses to questions about streaming practices (see Figures 2–5) showed less coherence than responses to the other theme areas in the survey. Board members had mixed views that did not always reflect the current evidence-based trend to decrease streaming practices. These data suggest that streaming practices are not on the agenda for many Boards. However, there are different reasons for this. The open-ended comments indicated that some schools had already removed streaming practices, whereas others consider this was not viable. These findings suggest there may be a need for continued awareness raising about the impact of streaming practices for schools that are continuing these approaches. Overall:

- almost two-thirds (67%) were aware of Kōkirihiā, the plan for removing streaming
- many schools did not have ending streaming as a strategic goal (84%)
- many Board members (70%) had not been part of a Board discussion on streaming/ability group practices
- respondents were reasonably evenly split (41% yes; 59% no) about whether ending streaming is a priority for their school.

Survey data about streaming

FIGURE 2 Are you aware of Kōkirihiā, the plan for removing streaming? (*n* = 262)

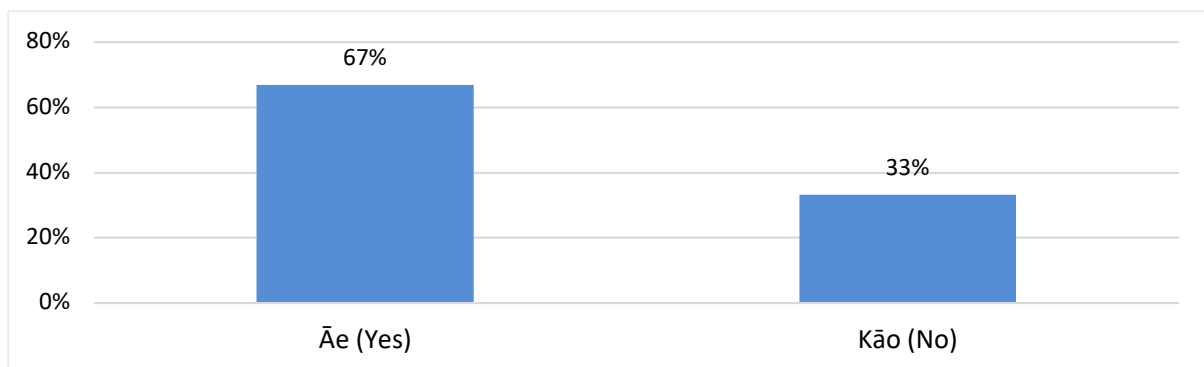


FIGURE 3 Have you been part of a Board discussion about streaming/ability grouping practices? (n = 261)

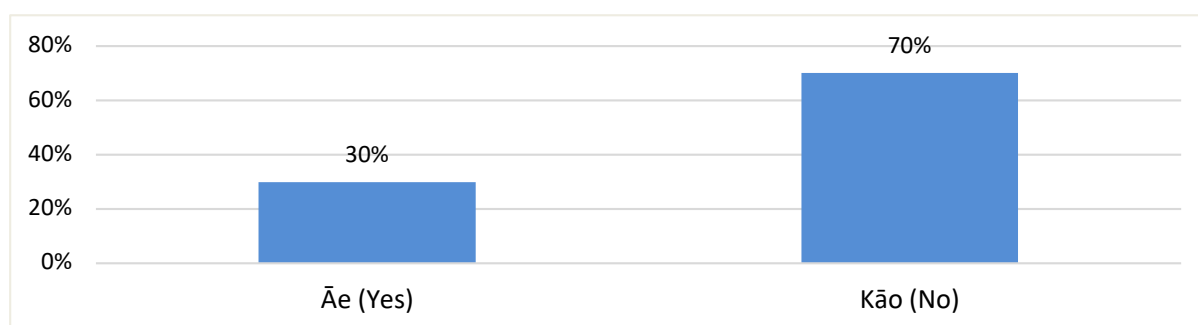


FIGURE 4 Does your school have ending streaming as a strategic goal? (n = 256)

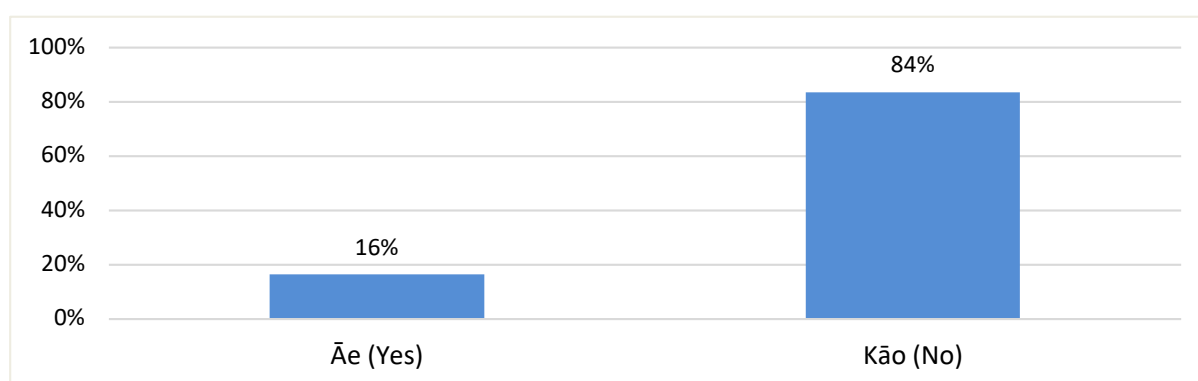
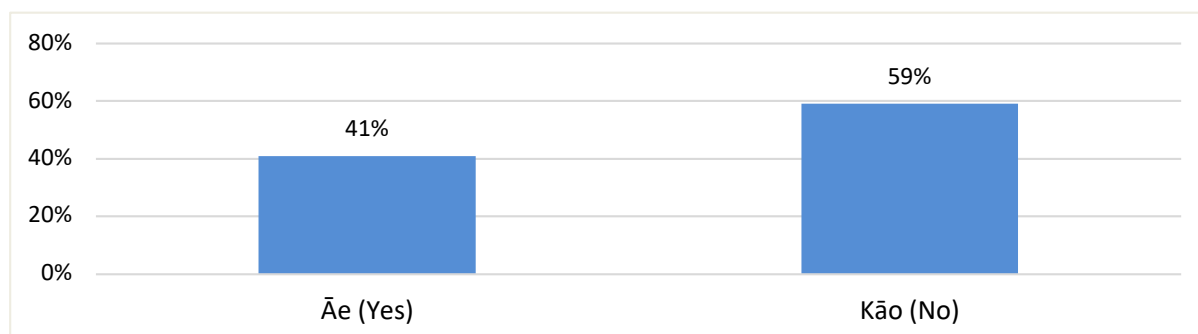


FIGURE 5 Should ending streaming be a strategic priority for the school? (n = 249)



The survey did not include an open-ended question about streaming; however, some respondents referred to streaming practices in other questions. Nearly all of these comments were from two groups of respondents, namely those:

- whose school did not stream or had already strategically removed streaming
- who considered streaming exaggerated existing inequities.

Examples of comments included:

We are a school that has over 25 contributing schools, coming to us from all over our local and wider geographical area. This impacts attendance and climate initiatives ... We have de-streaming in our strategic plan, but we have already actioned this and de-streamed our classes ...

Get rid of streaming Immediately. Research has consistently shown that streaming, or grouping students by perceived ability, exacerbates educational inequalities rather than alleviating them. While the intention behind streaming may be to tailor education to different learning needs, the reality is that it often results in significant disadvantages for students placed in lower streams. These students frequently experience lower self-esteem, reduced motivation, diminished academic outcomes, and lower attendance rates.

3. Assessment and data use

Introduction to the assessment and data use theme

In order to make effective evidence-based strategic decisions, Boards need access to summarised student data and require capability in interpreting data. Using data and evidence to drive consistent improvement in achievement is a Government priority and Boards play a key role in ensuring schools support the achievement of all groups of students.

Developing data literacy within School Boards is crucial to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and informed decision making. Data literacy capabilities include having an understanding of what the data can and cannot tell us, what the benefits and limits are of different data gathering tools, and building the confidence and capabilities needed to ask questions and to dig beneath the surface of reports. Effective data use goes beyond looking at overall achievement levels; it involves breaking data down to see how different groups of students are progressing, identifying trends and patterns over time, and identifying areas where extra support might be needed. When Boards build their confidence and skills in understanding data, they are in a better position to ask the right questions and to make thoughtful, evidence-based decisions that support equity and lift outcomes for all students.

Key findings about assessment and data use

There was strong agreement with the questions about assessment knowledge and data presentation (see Figures 6 and 7). Over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to all but one of the seven statements. In terms of the assessment knowledge questions, which were about the data presented to the Board, most respondents reported they:

- had sufficient data literacy to ask questions about the data (89%)
- felt confident in understanding what the data meant (87%).

Most respondents (over 80%) also reported that assessment data were presented to the Board in ways that:

- allowed them to see patterns by group (92%)
- clearly highlighted or explained patterns and trends (90%)
- were aggregated so they could see overall patterns (87%)
- made it easy to feed into decision making (84%).

There was one statement where less than 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with “I am familiar with assessments like PATs, e-asTTle, Te Waharoa Ararau and their purpose”, suggesting this could be a key focus area for PLD. In an open-ended question about what could be done differently at their school to improve their understandings of this area, some suggested this as a PLD focus. However, the most common suggested enhancements related to data analysis and reporting such as a desire for more data unpacking and context, and more presentation of trends. These comments suggest Boards have a wide range of needs in relation to assessment and data literacy.

Survey data about assessment and data use

FIGURE 6 Agreement with statements about assessment knowledge (n = 244)

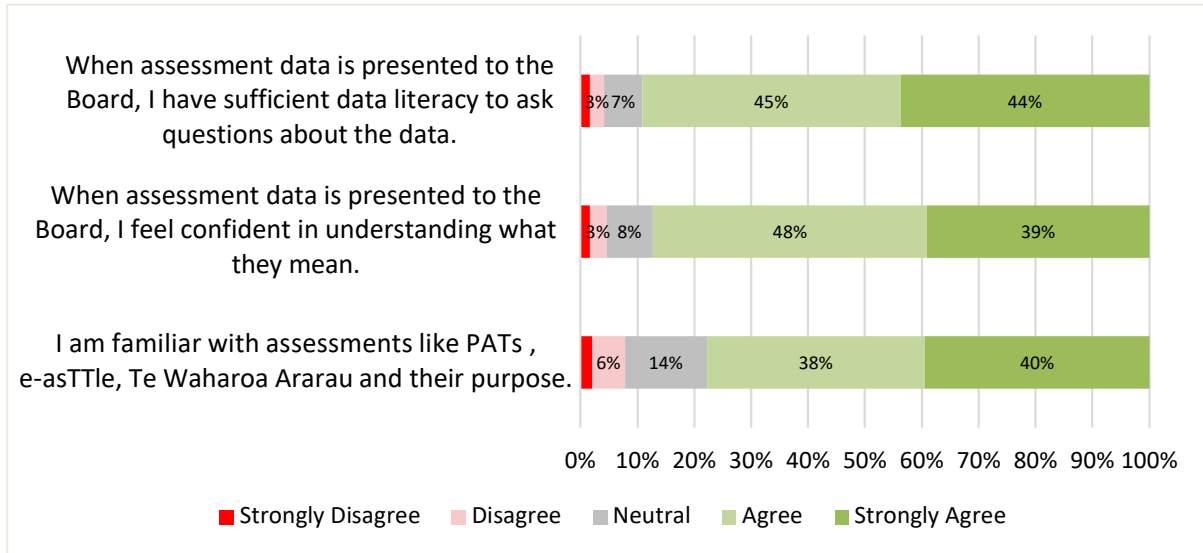
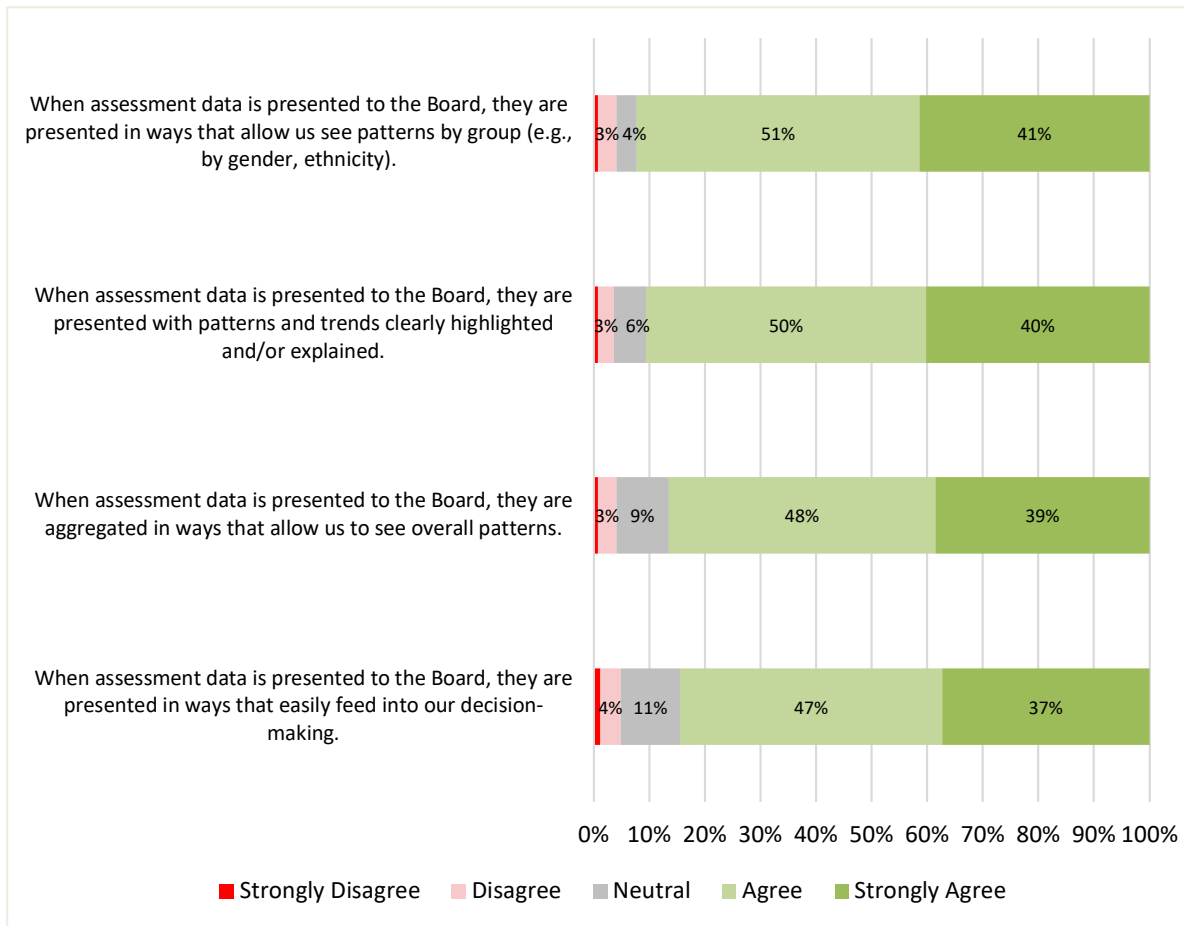


FIGURE 7 Agreement with statements about data presentation (n = 244)



Suggestions for improving understandings about assessment and data

Board members were asked to respond to the statement: *“One thing we could do differently as a school to improve our understanding of assessment and the use of data is ...”*. Just under half replied (130; 45%). Their responses suggest Boards have a wide range of support needs in relation to the use of assessments and understanding data. The main themes were suggested enhancements to:

- data analysis and reporting (37%)
- PLD and capability building (30%)
- systems and decisions (26%).

Boards want more nuanced reporting

Of those who responded, the most common theme (mentioned by 37%) was suggested enhancements to data analysis and reporting. Within this wider theme, respondents noted they needed:

- more data unpacking, context, or surrounding narrative (13%)
- more presentation of trends (e.g., between years or cohorts) (10%)
- more simplifying or tailoring of reports to the audience (5%)
- more ability to compare to similar schools (5%)
- more review of data for groups (e.g., high needs learners, by ethnicity or gender) (4%).

Examples of comments relating to these themes included:

Provide more context around data—all the aggregated data in the world cannot accurately measure the improvement/acceleration/growth of an individual child.

It would be more useful to have data on student achievement grouped according to dis/advantage, rather than primarily ethnicity which is how we currently group students. According to the definition of equity, as outlined at the start of this questionnaire, it is social dis/advantage that should be considered in relation to educational outcome, rather than ethnicity. We seem to have a preoccupation with ethnicity as if it is the same as social dis/advantage, which clearly it is not.

Find a simpler way to present data so that it is more understandable to the audience.

More capability building is needed for Boards and staff

The second theme related to PLD and capability building (30%). Within this wider theme, respondents noted they needed more:

- PLD, support, or induction for the Board (15%)
- exploring or planning of assessments (10%)
- focus on building teacher capability (5%).

Examples of comments relating to these themes included:

Continue to help non-educators on the Board understand concepts around assessment, progress, and achievement.

We could have a session where one or two teachers explain to the Board about how assessments are used to inform and help to plan teaching and learning.

To be a little more demanding of the HoDs who are not really proving that they have enough data and/or are not presenting it well enough with transparency to help understanding.

Boards want better systems and processes to assist in making decisions

The third theme was related to systems and decision making (26%). Within this wider theme, the main sub-themes were about:

- clearer decision making leading to action for students (11%)
- better systems or data ethics (8%).

Examples of comments relating to these themes included:

Less fluff and more looking at the numbers and what the causes are for low achievement/high achievement. Then having robust discussion on whether or not the current approach is working and what needs to change.

Sometimes in a small school it is difficult to present data in a way that meets privacy requirements and the needs of the Board to see where resources need to be spent.

A few respondents (4%) noted that their Board or school had a good understanding or approach to analysing and reporting data. These comments gave an indication of what good practice looks like. For example:

I think that both of the principals and senior leadership teams at my schools currently present data very well as part of the wider context. They also give a lot of other information to give more context to the data rather than just presenting data. In both schools it is very reflective with noticing the trends and patterns and also what the next steps may look like.

4. Attendance

Introduction to the attendance theme

Ensuring students are attending at school, so they are able to learn, is a key concern for principals and School Boards. Currently, student attendance is on the agenda and is a Government priority. We know that Aotearoa New Zealand has high chronic absence rates.² These rates have doubled since 2015, and, similar to other countries, peaked in 2022 during the COVID pandemic (Education Review Office, 2024). The rates are now starting to fall (Education Review Office, 2024). This pattern is similar for both primary and secondary schools.

We also know that regular attendance at school is related to better NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) achievement (Webber, 2020) and wellbeing outcomes for students (McGregor & Webber, 2020). The impact of low school attendance can persist over time. For example, at age 20, young people who were chronically absent from school are around 50% less likely to be attending tertiary education than their peers (Education Review Office, 2024).

Many principals are concerned about attendance. In the 2024 NZCER national survey of primary schools, 34% of principals selected “improving attendance” as a major issue facing their school (Li et al., in press). Principals at schools with more socioeconomic barriers (as measured by the EQI [Equity Index]) were the most likely to select this option (60%).

Key findings about attendance

Replies to the three questions about attendance showed nearly all schools and Boards were prioritising this area (see Figures 8–10). Nearly all respondents reported:

- attendance was a school-wide priority (92%)
- their Board received sufficient, timely information about student attendance patterns (92%)
- their current school plan for tracking and monitoring attendance was effective (94%).

In an open-ended question about additional ways of improving attendance, Board members suggested a wide range of strategies that included more community messaging and collaboration, more funding and resourcing, better measuring and reporting, and the use of positive strategies to engage students.

² Chronic absence is defined as students who attend for 70% or less of the term; that is, they miss 15 days or more of a 10-week term (Education Review Office, 2024).

Survey data about attendance

FIGURE 8 Our Board identifies attendance as a school-wide priority (n = 240)

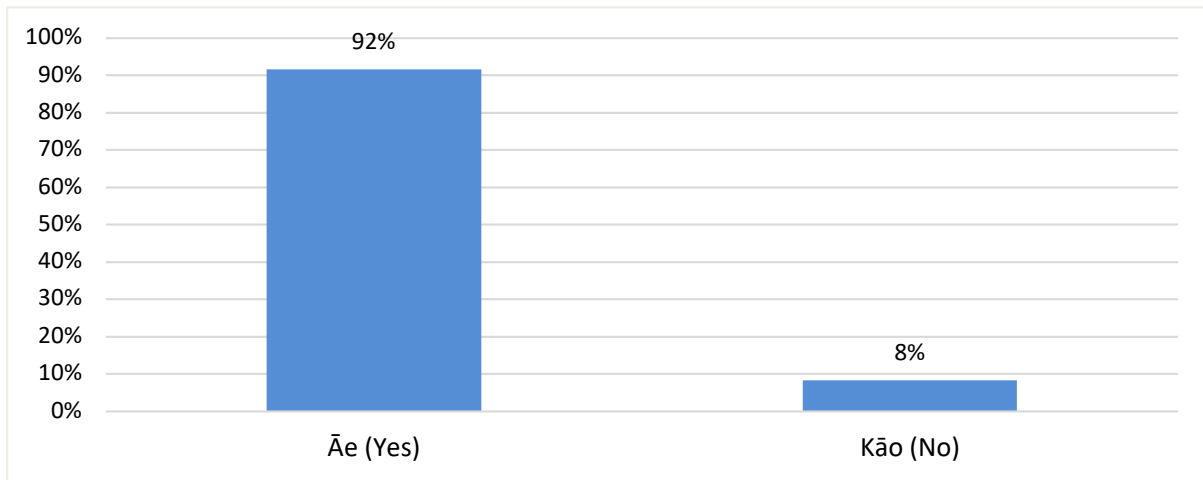


FIGURE 9 Our Board receives sufficient, timely information about student attendance patterns (n = 239)

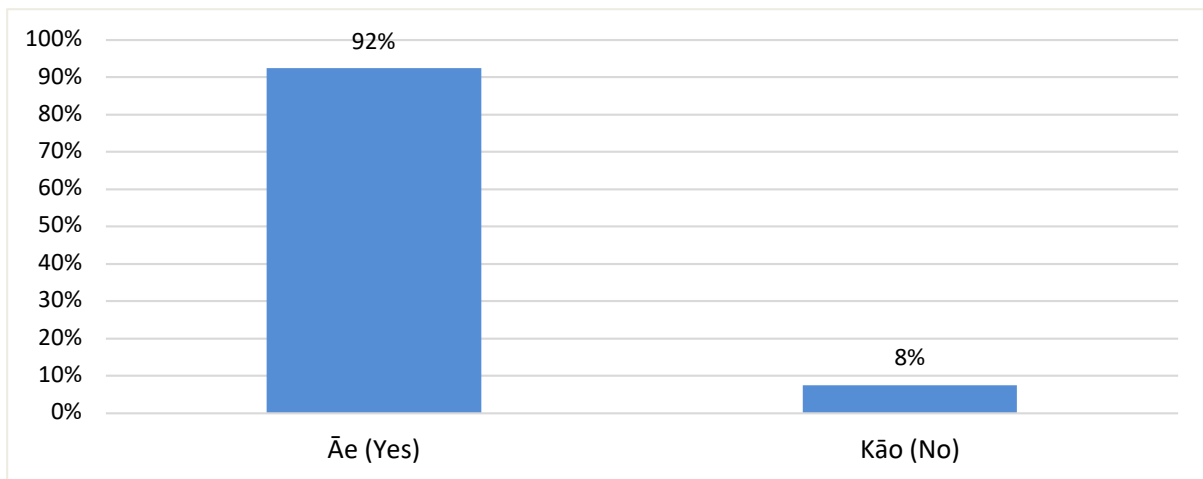
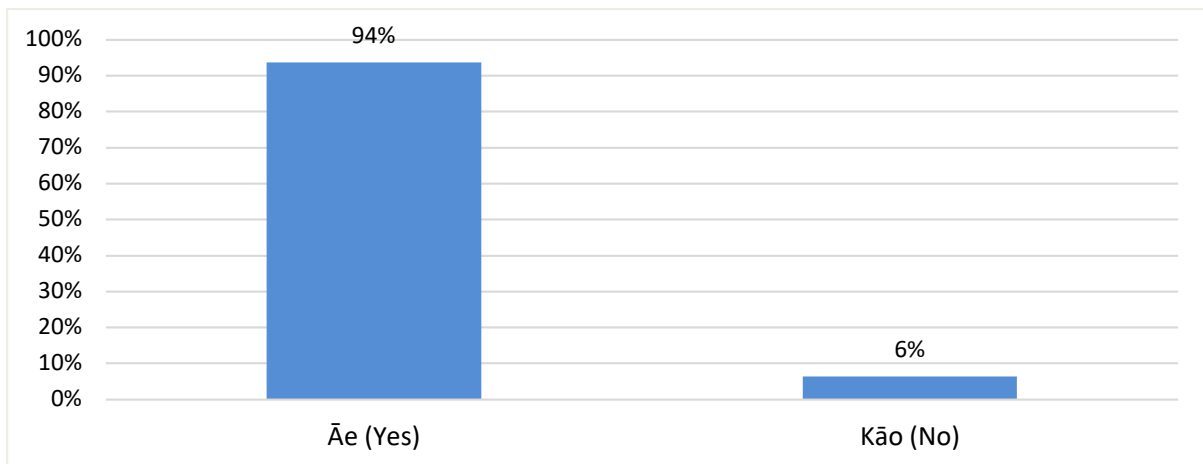


FIGURE 10 Is the current school plan for tracking and monitoring attendance effective? (n = 237)



What could be done differently to improve attendance?

Board members were asked to respond to the statement: *“One thing our school could do differently to improve attendance is ...”*. Just under half replied to this question (125; 43%). Their responses suggest Board members consider there is a wide range of strategies that could potentially impact on attendance rates. The main themes that emerged were enhancements to:

- messaging and collaboration (42%)
- funding for resources and support (18%)
- measuring and reporting (14%)
- redesigning approaches (mostly to engage students) (10%).

Boards wanted more focus on working collaboratively to improve attendance

Of those who responded, the most common theme (mentioned by 42%) was enhancements to messaging and collaboration with whānau and other members of the school community. The two most common sub-themes were related to the need for enhanced:

- school community messaging and collaboration (15%)
- ways of working with whānau (12%).

Examples of comments relating to these sub-themes included:

Making parents understand the benefit of knowing their child’s true attendance status and why.

Increase understanding of importance of engagement with whānau to lead to embedding the importance of attendance in the home, and strengthen home partnerships to collectively achieve these goals.

There were three smaller sub-themes relating to messaging and collaboration. Each was mentioned by 5% of Board members:

- student consultations
- collaboration with agencies and local groups
- local or national ways of addressing a culture of student holidays in term time.

Examples of comments relating to these themes included:

Asking the students why they don’t want to come to school or what is their barrier to coming to school.

Truancy officer does more hands-on visits to students at home.

Set a new culture about taking holidays during term time.

More funding is required to support students in need

The second most common theme was funding for resources and support (18%). The two sub-themes for this code were related to funding:

- of local support people (10%)
- to remove barriers (8%).

Examples of comments relating to these sub-themes included:

We had funding immediately post-COVID which we used for an ‘aunty’ figure to help particular families re-engage with school. This was very effective, and this sort of role could absolutely continue to be useful—but that was short-term funding that no longer exists.

A school van to pick up students who might not otherwise attend. For example, many children walk to school and some of them don't attend if it's raining.

Approaches could be redesigned or reframed

The two other main themes were related to challenges with measuring and reporting systems (14%) (e.g., better definition of a “justifiable absence”), and the need to redesigning approaches, mostly to be more strengths-based and engaging (10%). Examples of comments included:

The recording tool for attendance is not accurate and does not trigger the necessary steps that are needed to function as a recording tool.

Run student-based competitions to help them with their desire to attend.

Respondents' views about how to improve attendance varied considerably

Some respondents (11%) noted that their school was doing well with attendance strategies, or was doing all it could:

We are a small school that has the benefit of being able to interrogate each truancy issue and understand the causes.

We have a very strong management plan in place for student attendance and I would say we do it well.

A few respondents (4%) considered attendance was not a Board or school responsibility:

This is a parental responsibility not that of a Board. Boards do not determine whether a student makes it to school on any given day.

5. Climate change

Introduction to the climate change theme

Climate change and stressors are an increasing concern for Aotearoa New Zealand, including schools and kura, their communities, and therefore for School Boards.

International research warns of multiple ways in which exposure to climate stressors present a threat to children's development and educational outcomes (Prentice et al., 2024). Recently in Aotearoa New Zealand, regional storm and flooding events have significantly impacted on schools and communities, with some regions impacted multiple times. As one example, it was reported that over 500 North Island schools experienced impacts from a large cluster of storm and cyclone events in early 2023.³

An assessment by MoE in 2024 identified 1,102 schools and kura (i.e., around 44% of all schools and kura) as potentially at some risk of coastal, surface, and river flooding⁴ estimated to range from relatively low impact (e.g., flooding of carpark or fields) to more serious (more than 50% of buildings affected). A 2024 assessment prepared for the Climate Change Commission identified 106 primary schools at risk of coastal flooding or landslides relating to a sea level rise of 20 cm, a scenario that could occur within decades (Urban Intelligence, 2024).⁵

In the recent 2024 NZCER national survey of primary schools (Li et al., in press), 41% of principals indicated their school and community has already experienced flood impacts, either on homes of families and/or staff (32%), or on school property or staff/student ability to access school (31%). These data suggest that climate stressors are already significantly impacting on Aotearoa New Zealand schools and kura, and therefore it is vital that Boards are fully informed about possible impacts and mitigations.

Key findings about climate change

Most respondents (78%) thought that climate change would have some form of impact on their local community in the lifetime of students, and 53% thought this impact would be moderate or major (see Figure 11). However, it was less common to find schools taking climate action. Compared to the other focus areas in the survey, respondents showed less agreement with the statements about possible climate change actions occurring at their school (see Figure 12) with only around half agreeing or strongly agreeing that:

- our Board actively supports a focus on sustainability and climate change (52%)
- our school has provided support to our community during and after climate-related events (48%).⁶

³ See <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt-repair-or-rebuild-all-weather-hit-schools>

⁴ This information was previously published on the MoE's website in the National Flood Risk Management Programme section. This programme has since been inactivated and the information can no longer be found on the Ministry's website.

⁵ This assessment did not include inland (i.e., non-coastal) fluvial or pluvial flood risks.

⁶ The figure is also likely to reflect the fact that some schools have not needed to provide support.

Respondents were least likely to agree that their school:

- was taking active steps to reduce carbon emissions (43%)
- had a school-wide focus on reducing emissions associated with how students and/or staff get to school (31%).

These figures were similar to the responses of principals in the 2024 NZCER national survey of primary schools (Li et al., in press). In terms of information that could inform climate action, just 16% of surveyed principals said they had information about their school's carbon footprint.

Figure 13 suggests that Boards have substantial support, advice, or guidance needs in relation to climate change. The most pressing needs mentioned by 50% or more of respondents were:

- examples of school climate/sustainability policies (62%)
- information about what MoE is doing to respond to climate change (58%)
- hearing from Boards whose schools are taking action on climate change (51%)
- information about Māori-led solutions and approaches to climate change (50%)
- information about climate change strategies and actions in our local area (50%).

Survey data about climate change

FIGURE 11 What impact do you think climate change will have on the place and community where your school is located within your students' lifetimes? (n = 232)

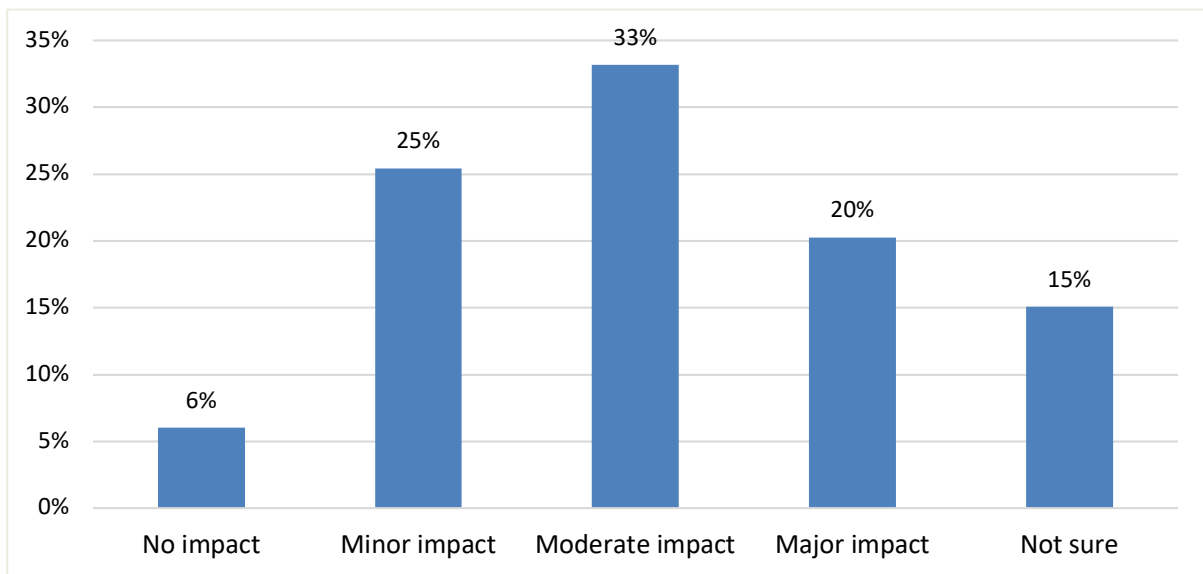


FIGURE 12 Agreement with statements about climate change (n = 231)

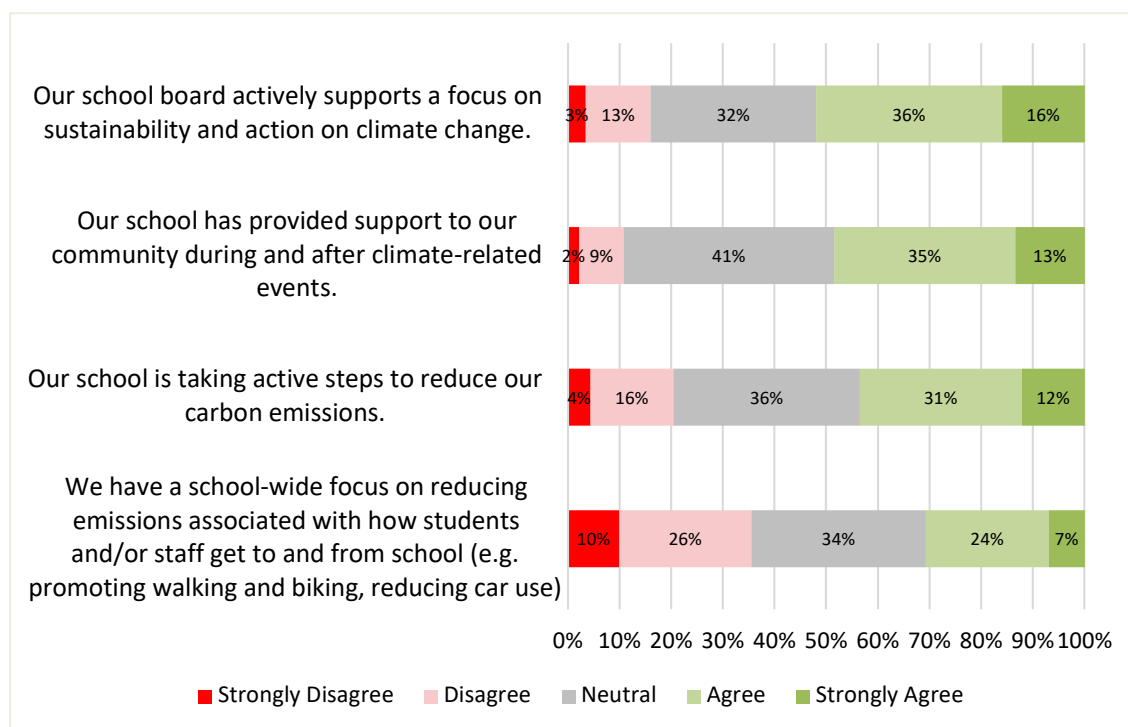
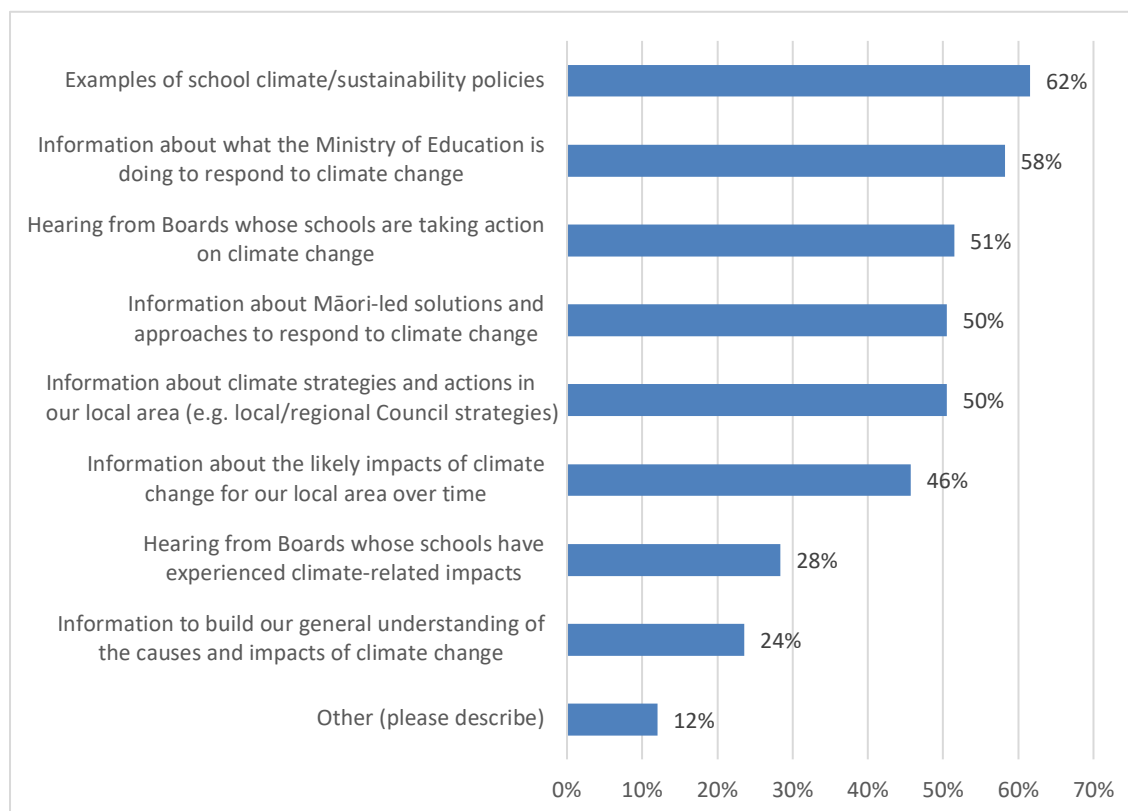


FIGURE 13 What support, advice, or guidance would be useful for your Board? (n = 208)



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

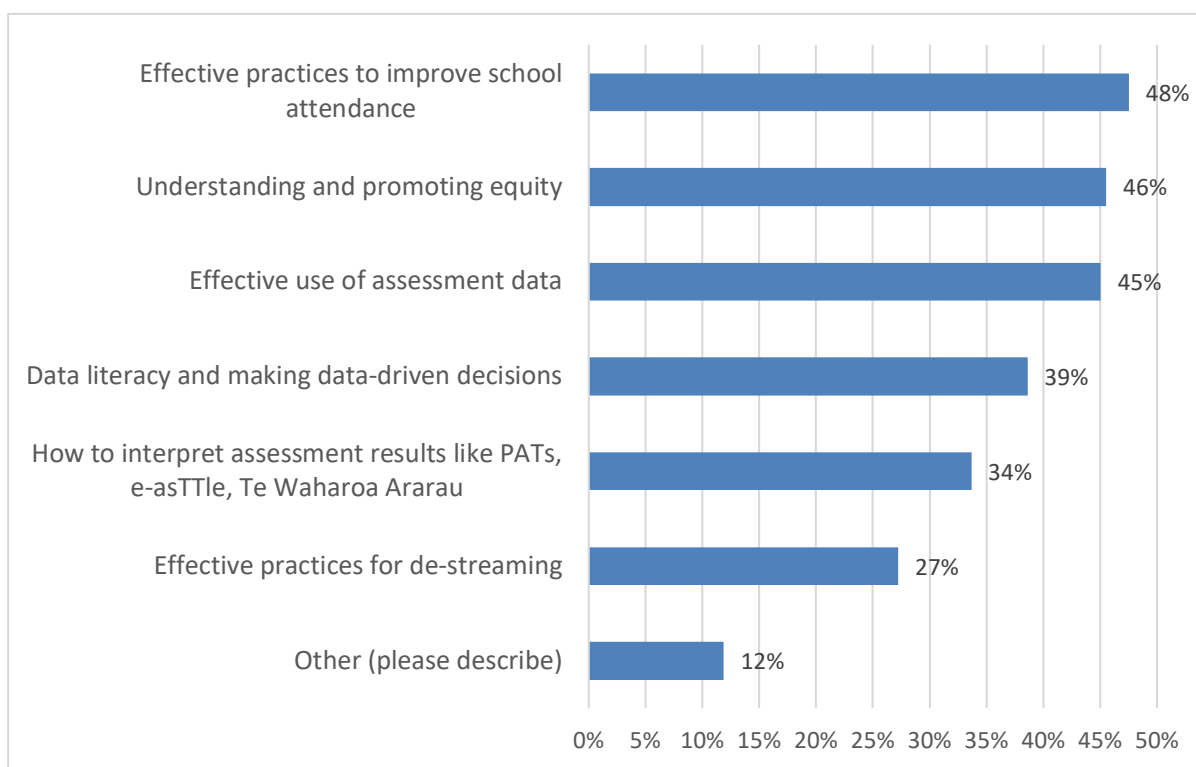
6. Areas for development and learning

Key findings about areas for development

A total of 202 (70%) of respondents replied to a fixed-choice question about areas for professional development. Figure 14 shows that Board members have a wide range of professional development needs, with the most pressing being:

- effective practices to improve school attendance (48%)
- understanding and promoting equity (46%)
- effective use of assessment data (45%).

FIGURE 14 **Which of the following areas would you like professional development on in the future?**
(n = 202)



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

The Board role is complex and rewarding

A total of 82 (28%) of Board members responded to a final open-ended question asking if they had any other comments about their work as a Board member. The most common theme mentioned by 43% was about staffing and operating a Board. Sub-themes included:

- being a Board member is a demanding job with significant responsibilities (12%)
- tensions with the Board model (e.g., clarity between governance and management) (12%)
- the need for more Board training and support (10%).

Examples of comments included:

It is a relentless job, and the responsibilities/liabilities that sit on the shoulders of a voluntary school board is frightening.

As Board members we are constantly being reminded of the division between governance and management. I feel the outcome of this is we are not given a strong mandate to ask questions [about areas] that management oversee because it is interpreted as not being “our area of concern”. I genuinely feel our role has become property caretaker and brand manager. I feel every outcome and decision is a “management issue” and the Board just meet to make sure we’ve ticked all our boxes for compliance (budget/property/cultural/RAMs etc). We are administrators not leaders. The system is flawed.

I think NZ’s School Boards could be trained / better equipped in strategic plan development and execution.

A total of 10% made comments about one or more of the four main theme areas in the survey (equity and streaming, assessment and data use, student attendance, and climate change). One other main theme focused on the need to direct more funding towards meeting students’ needs (12%). For example:

When I joined the Board, I was amazed at how little funding is actually provided to schools when compared to the functions the MoE and Government wants them to achieve.

Finally, 16% commented on how rewarding and important the Board role is:

I have an excellent new BoT Presiding Member this year who has brought direction and stability to the Board. We are working on the BoT workplan for 2025 to bring us into the governance space in a focused and purposeful way so we can start making informed decisions on the direction of the school.

Our panel is mostly new to Board instructions and finding it challenging sometimes but their resilience and commitment have pulled through for the last year. Teamwork with incredible integrity has made our job as a Board possible. Positivity and compassion have enabled us to work collaboratively with our Senior Management, Staff and community to provide the best for our tamariki.

7. Summing up: Board members have a wide range of support needs

The Board members who responded to this survey were interested in developing more knowledge about all four focus areas of the survey. Most were committed to promoting equity but also had substantial PLD and support needs in this space. These needs included building stronger understandings about:

- the meaning of equity and how to promote it, including the impact of streaming
- how to support inclusion and student diversity
- ways of collaborating with whānau and communities
- how to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and build stronger iwi connections
- culturally responsive approaches
- ways of sourcing extra funding and staffing to support identified school equity focuses.

A few Board members expressed views that suggested they were not cognisant of the systemic and structural nature of educational inequities. Instead, these comments reflected an “individual responsibility” mindset. These respondents did not support common equity-focused practices such as honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, or consider that schools had a role to play in supporting and encouraging student attendance. These findings confirm there is a need to build stronger understandings about the meaning of equity and what equity-focused practices look like.

Many Board members were focused on data-driven decision making. Support and PLD needs in this space included building data capability and stronger understandings of:

- the tools that schools use to assess student achievement
- effective uses of assessment data to identify student needs and drive decision making
- ways that data could be better presented and communicated in order to enhance understanding and decision making.

Nearly all respondents reported that student attendance was a school-wide priority. They considered they received sufficient information about student attendance patterns, and their school had an effective plan for tracking and monitoring attendance. Their main support need was more information about effective strategies for improving school attendance which included ways of collaborating with whānau and communities.

Compared to the other focus areas in the survey, respondents showed less agreement that a range of climate change actions were occurring at their school. Unsurprisingly, they also had a wide range of PLD and support needs relating to this focus area, including:

- examples of school climate/sustainability policies
- information about what MoE is doing to respond to climate change
- hearing from Boards whose schools are taking action on climate change
- information about Māori-led solutions and approaches to climate change
- information about climate change strategies and actions in their local area.

One other PLD and support need that emerged from the data was related to clarifying the Board model and the difference between governance and management.

The recent 2024 NZCER national survey of primary schools (Li et al., in press) included a question about principals' professional development needs. School principals have a key leadership role on School Boards, therefore their professional development needs are likely to be highly connected to their Board's needs. The principal PLD question (answered by 182 principals) included the four focus areas in this current report but also canvassed a wider range of topics. The two top topics selected by half or more principals were:

- artificial intelligence (AI) in education (56%)
- working with local hapū and/or iwi (50%).

Other areas selected by 20% or more of principals included:

- leading engagement with parents, whānau, and communities (36%)
- mental health and wellbeing (32%)
- developing curriculum that reflects local contexts (31%)
- giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (29%)
- making evidence-based decisions (28%)
- learning for equity (24%)
- analysing assessment data (24%)
- inclusive education and diversity (21%)
- strategic planning and implementation (20%).

With the exception of AI and mental health and wellbeing, all of the above were suggested by some Board members as areas that they could benefit from more PLD or support.

In summing up, the Board and principal data presented in this report suggest that School Boards have a wide range of support and development needs that go beyond the four themes in this report. Boards need to be aware of newer areas such as the use of AI in education (Coblentz et al., in press), and areas that are of increasing importance in the school sector such as understanding how some attendance strategies need to be designed in ways that are cognisant of students' mental health and wellbeing needs.

Many of the PLD and support needs identified by respondents are well-aligned with current government priorities and targets such as smarter assessment and reporting, greater use of data and evidence to drive consistent improvement in achievement and improving student attendance at school. Therefore, providing additional support to Boards is likely to assist Board members in their role, as well as strengthen national approaches.

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Kupu | Key terms

Term	Meaning or definition
AI	Artificial intelligence
BoT	Board of Trustees (former name of School Board)
EQI	Equity Index
HoD	Head of Department (in secondary schools)
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
PATs, e-asTTle, Te Waharoa Ararau	Common school assessment tools
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLD	Professional learning and development
Te Whakarōputanga	Te Whakarōputanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa—New Zealand School Boards' Association (formally known as the School Trustees' Association [STA])

APPENDIX A: Respondent demographics

FIGURE A1. **Participants' gender** ($n = 227$)

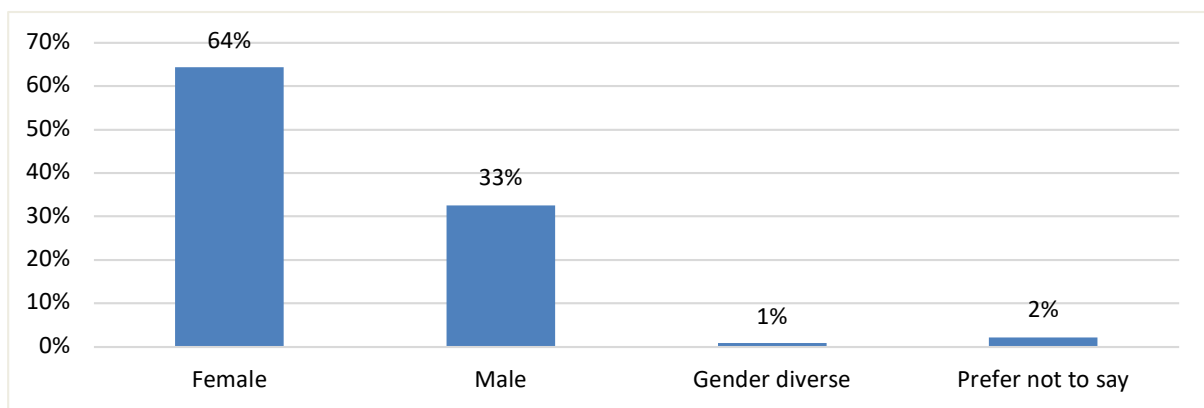
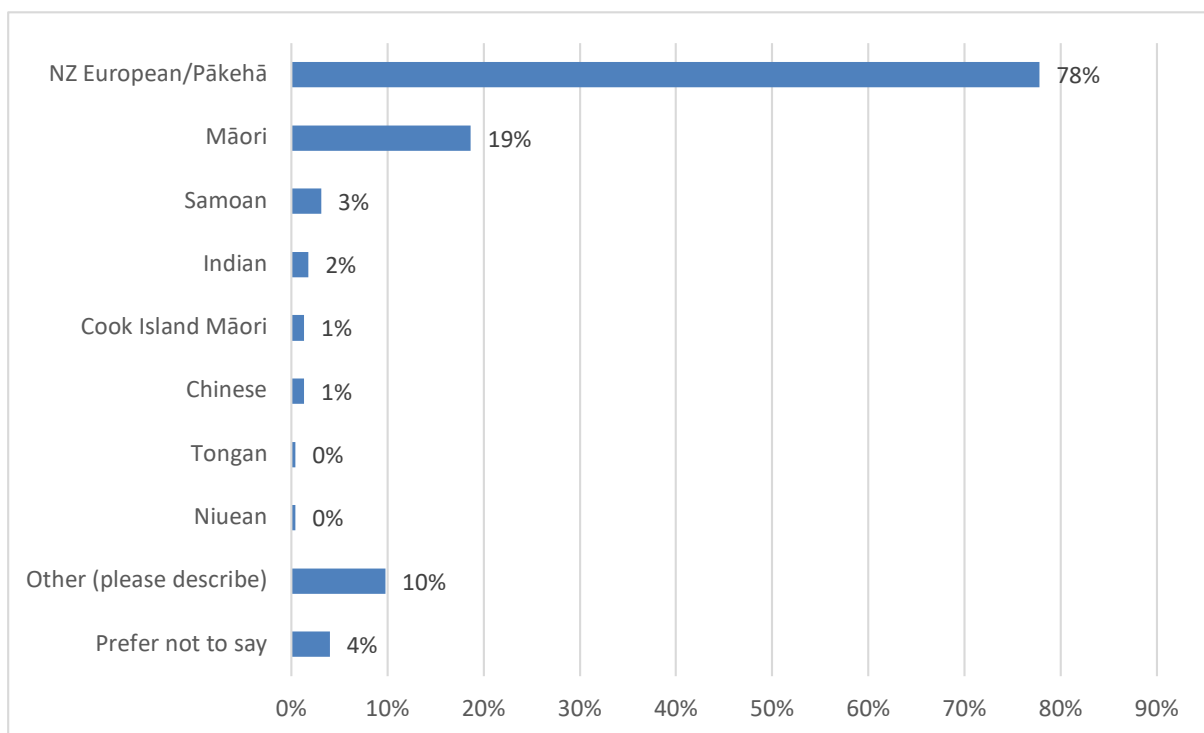


FIGURE A2. **Participants' ethnicity** ($n = 225$)



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

FIGURE A3. **How long have you been a member on this Board?** ($n = 223$)

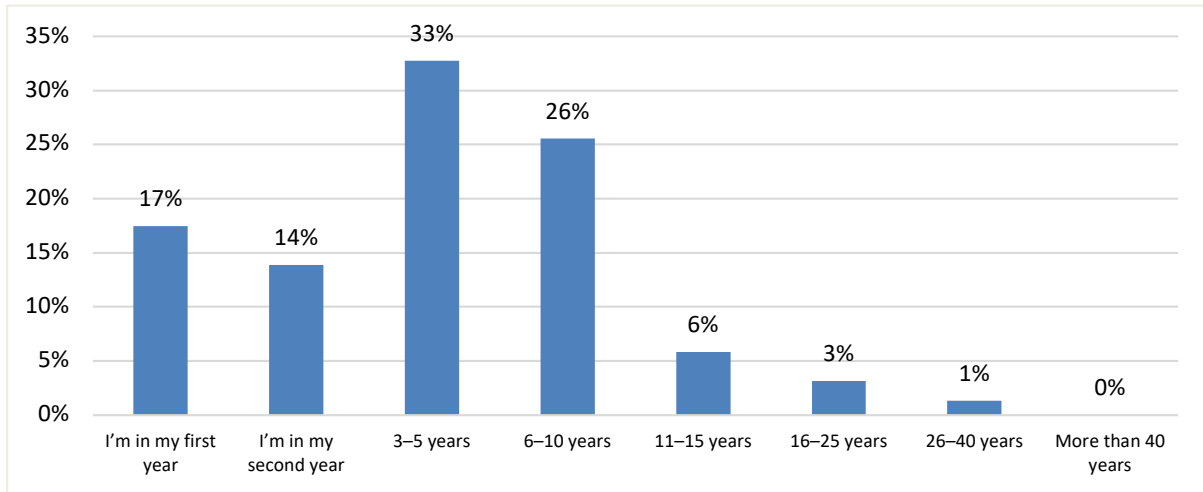


FIGURE A4. **Are you the chair of your Board?** ($n = 226$)

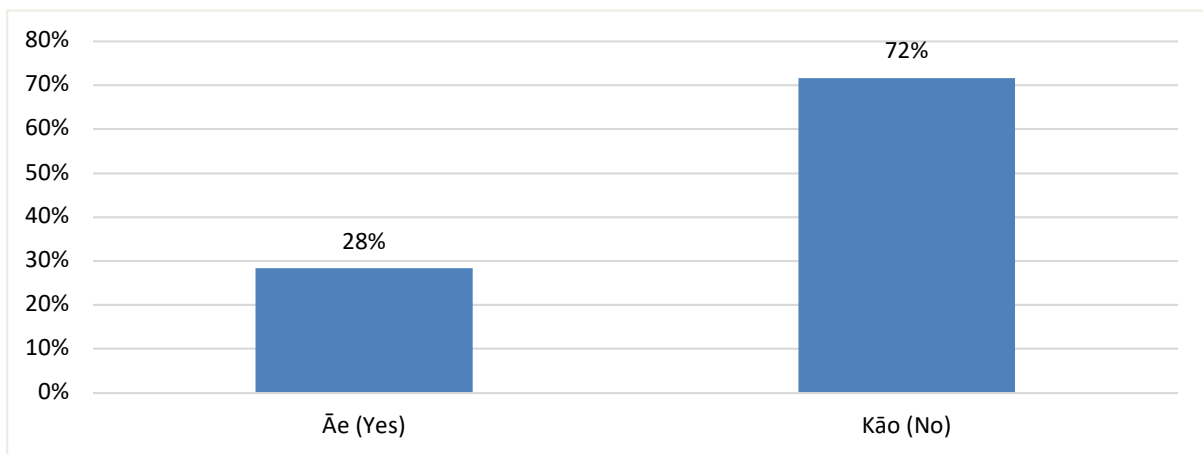


TABLE A1. Breakdown of respondents by area
(n = 287)

Urban area	N	%
Major urban area	114	40
Rural other	50	17
Small urban area	37	13
Large urban area	36	13
Medium urban area	28	10
Rural settlement	22	8

TABLE A2. Breakdown of respondents by region
(n = 287)

Regional council	N	%
Auckland region	76	26
Canterbury region	38	13
Waikato region	38	13
Wellington region	24	8
Bay of Plenty region	19	7
Otago region	18	6
Hawke's Bay region	13	5
Taranaki region	11	4
Northland region	10	3
Manawatū-Whanganui region	8	3
Southland region	8	3
Gisborne region	7	2
Marlborough region	6	2
Nelson region	4	1
Tasman region	4	1
West Coast region	3	1

TABLE A3. Breakdown of respondents by school's co-ed status (n = 287)

Co-ed status	N	%
Co-educational	271	94
Girls School	8	3
Boys School	7	2
Primary Co-ed/ Secondary Girls	1	0

TABLE A4. Breakdown of respondents by school type (n = 287)

School type	N	%
Full primary	106	37
Contributing	91	32
Secondary (Years 9–15)	36	13
Secondary (Years 7–15)	19	7
Intermediate	15	5
Composite	13	5
Specialist school	6	2
Secondary (Years 7–10)	1	0
Secondary (Years 11–15)	0	0

