
9.

Interactions and collaborations, including Kāhui Ako

This section reports the principals' and trustees' perspectives on their involvement in Kāhui Ako.⁵¹ Kāhui Ako or Communities of Learning began forming in mid-2015, as part of a major new policy, Investing in Educational Success.⁵² The initiative seeks to make more of the knowledge held within each school and ensure that knowledge about each student is shared as they moved onto the next education level. The schools making up each Kāhui Ako identify shared achievement challenges and work together to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

In the 2015 national survey we included questions about people's expectations of Kāhui Ako. At that point, almost two-thirds of secondary school principals were interested in their school joining a Kāhui Ako, and a further quarter were unsure. Many principals were expecting Kāhui Ako to improve transition to secondary school, lead to more sharing of useful knowledge for teaching and learning, and bring more traction on tackling issues around student achievement and engagement. Teachers' views were more mixed, including positive expectations as well as concerns about possible negative impacts for teachers and schools. Three years on, we explore the extent to which principals' original expectations have been borne out.

Before focusing on Kāhui Ako, we discuss the extent to which schools interact and work collaboratively with other schools, post-secondary education providers, employers, and iwi.

51 In 2018, no Kāhui Ako-related questions were included in the teacher questionnaire, in the interests of managing the questionnaire's length.

52 In 2015, these were called Communities of Schools, and subsequently changed to Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako.

Principals' views on their interaction and work with others

Joint work between schools is most likely to involve principals sharing leadership practices, visiting other schools, and sharing PLD

We asked all principals what joint work their school currently does with other schools (see Table 30). Most principals (85%) say they share and reflect on leadership practice at the principal level. This is a new item in the 2018 survey. Most also visit other schools to learn from each other (82%, up considerably from 54% in 2015), and share PLD (80%, asked for the first time in 2018). Kāhui Ako are likely to be having an impact here.

Many of the principals also work with other schools to support a subject teacher who is the sole subject provider in their school (68%), share challenges and approaches around getting change in pedagogy (59%), and discuss school achievement data (53%).

Some principals discuss student engagement or wellbeing data (41%), work together to place students who are having difficulty in one school into other school (40%), have regular meetings of schools as a group with social agencies (36%, continuing to fall from just over half in 2012), and work with local schools to reduce truancy (20%).

TABLE 30 Current joint work with other schools, reported by principals; 2012, 2015, and 2018

Kind of joint work	2012 (n = 177) %	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
Share and reflect on leadership practice at the principal level	*	*	85
Inter-school visits to learn from each other	41	54	82
Share professional learning and development	*	*	80
Support for teachers if sole subject provider in school	63	63	68
Share challenges and approaches around getting change in pedagogy	*	*	59
Discuss our individual school achievement data	*	*	53
Discuss our individual school student engagement or wellbeing data	*	*	41
Work together to place students having difficulty in one school into another school	42	36	40
Regular meetings of schools as a group with social agencies	51	46	36
Work with other local schools to reduce truancy	29	29	20

* Not asked.

Most principals report their school interacts with post-secondary education providers

Interactions with post-secondary education providers are common and have remained much the same since 2015. Most of the principals (91%) report using these providers for STAR courses; for liaison about student pathways and student understanding of options (87%); or for Gateway courses (81%). Ten percent of the principals reported some competition with these providers, 4% had either no or limited contact, or no local post-secondary education providers.

Just over one-third of the principals say they interact with post-secondary education providers to share information about students. A decile-related difference is that over half of decile 1–4 principals say they do this, decreasing to 13% of decile 9–10 principals.

Most principals report their school has some interaction with local employers and community organisations

We asked for the first time in 2018 about schools' interactions with local employers and community organisations (see Table 31). Almost all (94%) of the principals report that some students work with local employers or community organisations as part of their programme. This was reported by all principals of decile 1–4 schools.

Three-quarters (76%) of the principals report that they invite employers and organisations to talk to students about potential post-school pathways, and over half say employers provide taster sessions for students.

Less common is ongoing work with local employers or community organisations.

TABLE 31 Interactions with local employers and community organisations, reported by principals

Type of interaction	Principals (n = 167) %
Some students work with local employers or community organisations as part of their programme	94
We invite local employers and community organisations to talk to students about potential post-school pathways	76
Some employers provide taster sessions for students	58
We actively seek engagement with local employers to understand the skills and knowledge students will need	53
Some students undertake innovative projects with local employers or community organisations	44
I am part of local networks that include employers	30
We are co-constructing some programmes with local employers or community organisations	26
We invite local employers to give us feedback on our programmes	22

Over half of principals report their school has discussions with local iwi

Another new question in the 2018 survey asked principals about the interactions their school has with local iwi (see Table 32). Eighteen percent have no interaction with local iwi, and 4% used the "Other" response to say that they have limited interaction with iwi.

The most common interaction is discussions with iwi about how best to provide for Māori students (59% of principals). Some (22%–32% of principals) report that iwi have input into strategic planning, co-construct some student support, or co-construct some programmes.

One-fifth of the principals selected "Other" in response to this question. Seven used this category to say they had limited interaction with iwi (but more than no interaction). This included a desire to have more interaction, and some hesitancy about knowing how to progress this. A few principals also used the "Other" category to say they had iwi representation on the board of trustees (four principals) or iwi involvement in a whānau group (two principals).

TABLE 32 Interactions with iwi, reported by principals

Type of interaction	Principals (n = 167) %
We have discussions with iwi about how best to provide for Māori students	59
Iwi have input into our strategic planning	32
Iwi co-construct some student support with us	26
Iwi co-construct some programmes with us	22
No interactions	18
Iwi provide feedback on our annual report	4
Limited interaction with iwi	4

Principals from decile 1–2 schools are least likely to report they interact with iwi about how best to provide for Māori students (32%, compared with 58%–76% of principals leading schools of other deciles).⁵³

Principals from metropolitan schools are more likely than principals of other schools to say they have no interaction with local iwi (25%, compared with 11% of principals of town schools, and no principals of schools in small cities or rural schools). Five of the six rural principals say that iwi have input into the school's strategic planning (compared with 22%–38% of principals of schools in town or cities). Four of the six rural principals say that iwi co-construct some programmes (compared with 16%–32% of principals of schools in towns or cities).

Principals' views on Kāhui Ako

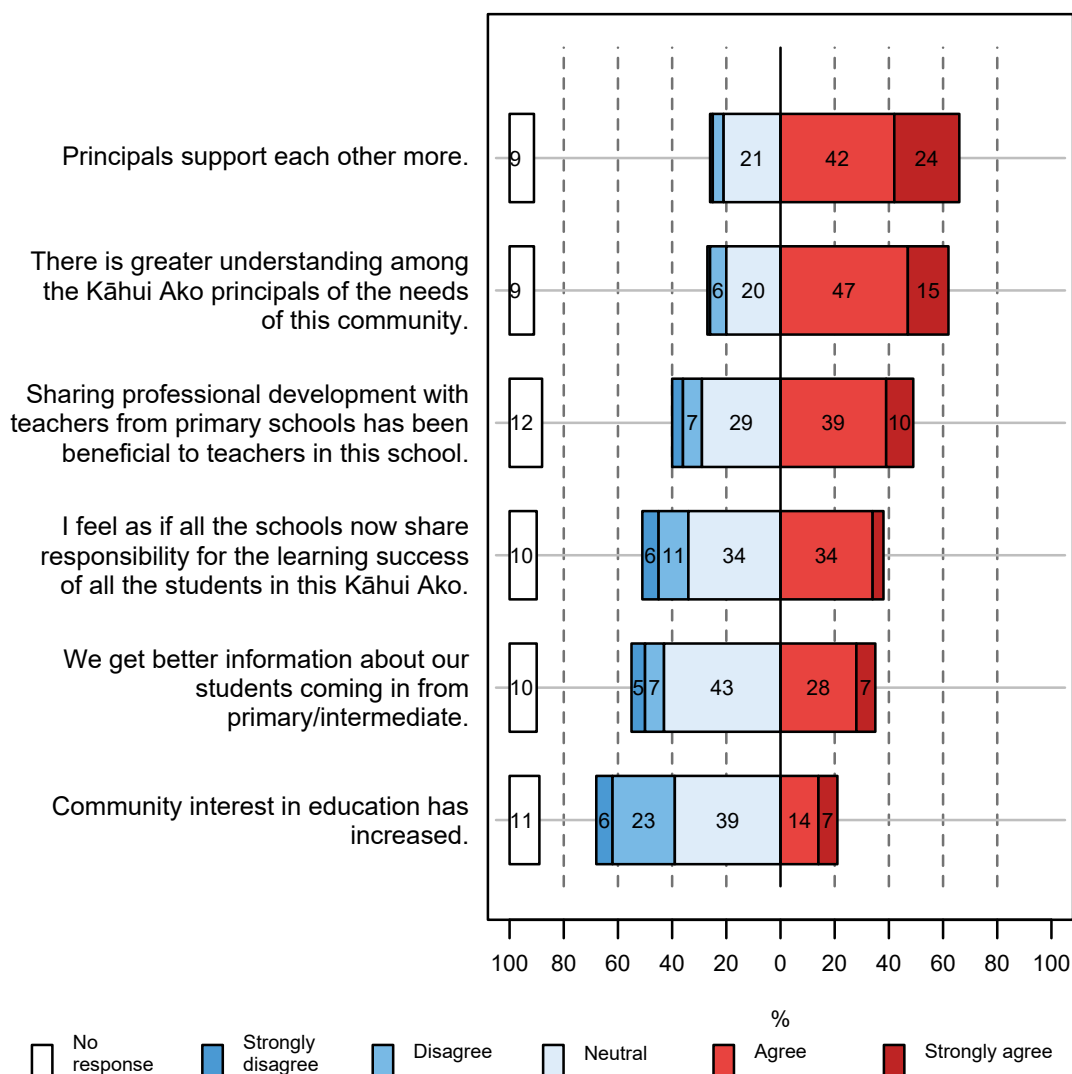
Most schools are in a Kāhui Ako and principals report some benefits

Kāhui Ako are in their early days, and the findings from this 2018 survey will provide a useful baseline for understanding how they develop over time. In 2018, most (82%) of the principals responding to the survey are in secondary schools in Kāhui Ako (considerably more than the 63% who expressed interest in joining a Kāhui Ako in 2015). Over two-thirds of these principals (69%) are a member of a principals or stewardship group that meets regularly; and 37% are a member of a similar group that meets when needed. Fourteen percent are a Kāhui Ako leader, and 4% have no formal role in their Kāhui Ako.

Principals report benefits from being in a Kāhui Ako (see Figure 42). Two-thirds of principals from schools in a Kāhui Ako agree that principals support each other more, 62% agree that principals have a greater understanding of the needs of the community, and almost half (49%) agree that sharing professional development with teachers from primary schools has been beneficial.

⁵³ The greatest proportion of decile 1–2 schools are metropolitan schools, which might account for this difference.

FIGURE 42 Changes in relationships and increased inter-school sharing, as a result of Kāhui Ako, reported by principals in a Kāhui Ako (n = 137)



Looking back at some of the expectations principals expressed in 2015, 65% of principals thought Kāhui Ako would lead to improvement in student transition to secondary school. Something that would support improved transition is secondary schools getting better information about students coming in from primary/intermediate schools. In 2018, 35% of principals in a Kāhui Ako say they are getting better information, with a further 43% responding “neutral”. As we saw earlier,⁵⁴ there has been little change in the proportion of principals who say they get good information about students’ academic strengths and needs when they enter their school (78% indicate this happens at their school, compared with 75% in 2015), suggesting this could be a fruitful area for some Kāhui Ako to strengthen.

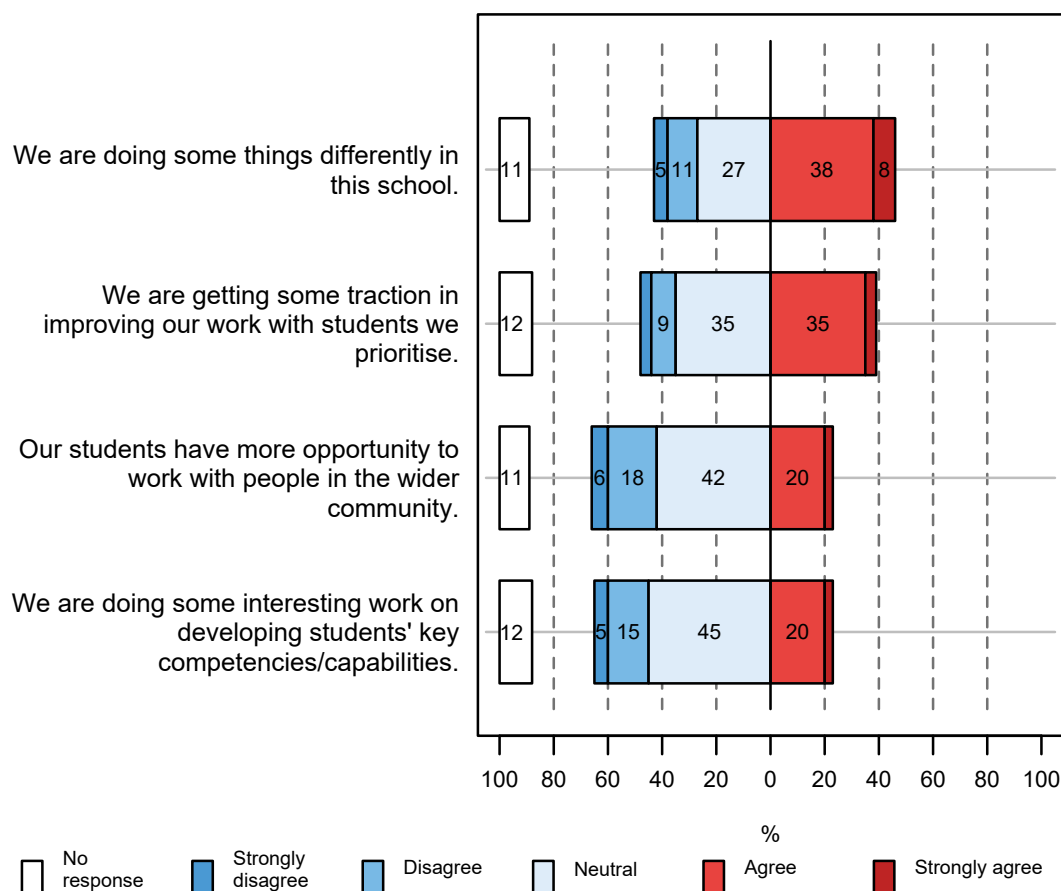
In 2015, 23% of the principals expected the Kāhui Ako approach to lead to better professional support for principals. In 2018, two-thirds of the principals in a Kāhui Ako say principals support each other more—one form of professional support for school leaders.

⁵⁴ See *Supporting students during the transition to secondary school* in Section 4: *Teaching and learning in secondary schools*.

Some principals are starting to see changes within their school or for students as a result of being in a Kāhui Ako

Most Kāhui Ako are in their early days, as indicated by the lower proportions of principals in one reporting changes within the school or for students (see Figure 43). Forty-six percent agree they are doing some things differently, and 39% agree they are getting some traction in improving work with students they prioritise.

FIGURE 43 Gains in schools from Kāhui Ako participation, reported by principals in a Kāhui Ako (n = 137)

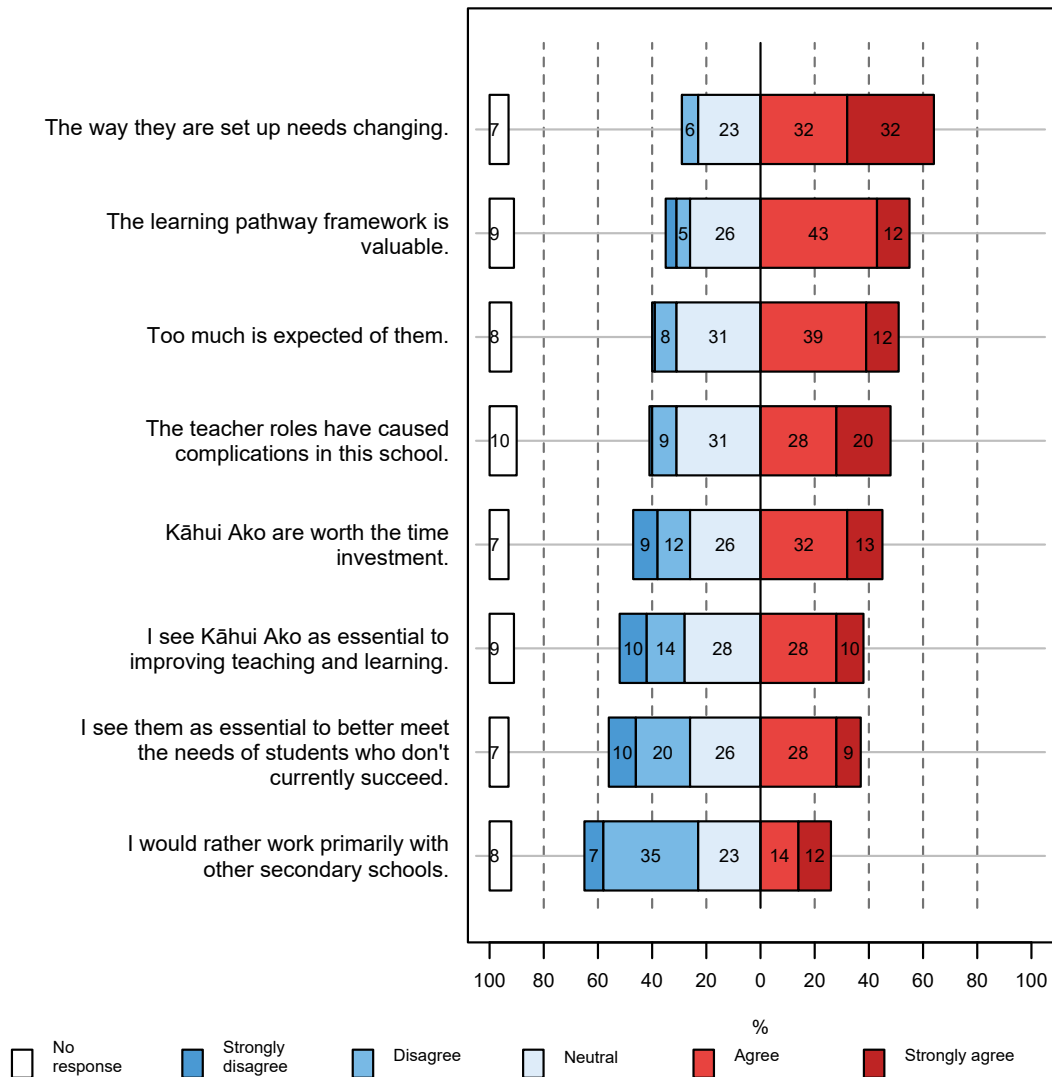


Almost two-thirds of the principals in a Kāhui Ako consider that the way Kāhui Ako are set up needs changing

We also asked principals in a Kāhui Ako what they think about Kāhui Ako overall (see Figure 44), rather than specifically the one their school belongs to. Principals are most positive about the learning pathway that is enabled by Kāhui Ako—55% of the principals in a Kāhui Ako agree that the learning pathway framework is valuable. Forty-five percent agree that Kāhui Ako are worth the time investment, and just under 40% see Kāhui Ako as essential for improving teaching and learning, and better meeting the needs of students who don't currently succeed.

Almost two-thirds of the principals (64%) think that the way Kāhui Ako are set up needs changing, and half (51%) think that too much is expected of Kāhui Ako.

FIGURE 44 Principals' views of Kāhui Ako, reported by principals in a Kāhui Ako (n = 137)



All principals were also given the opportunity to provide comments about Kāhui Ako, and 114 (68% of all principals responding to the survey) did so. Consistent with the finding above that almost two-thirds of principals in a Kāhui Ako think the way they are set up needs changing, the most common theme (in comments from 21% of all principals) was principals' concerns about the Kāhui Ako structure or model, including those who preferred previous ways of working as a cluster.

Thirteen percent of principals expressed funding-related concerns. In 2015, 35% of principals expected working in a Kāhui Ako would afford them better opportunities to access new funding sources. We cannot tell from principals' responses in 2018 the extent to which this has eventuated. What we can say is that funding continues to be an area causing concern for some principals.

Around 10% of principals made comments about each of the following themes: being unconvinced of the value of Kāhui Ako; having concerns about roles; still being in the throes of setting up their Kāhui Ako; or feeling it is too soon to say. Smaller proportions of comments (around 5%) were from those who had encountered difficulties working in a Kāhui Ako, including primary schools dominating, difficulty finding relievers, or concern about workloads.

Some principals used this open question to write a positive comment about Kāhui Ako. Thirteen percent of comments were principals positive about sharing expertise and learning together. Four percent of comments were from principals optimistic about the future of Kāhui Ako.

These quotes illustrate the key themes in principals' comments about Kāhui Ako:

We meet as a cluster of schools and do much of what is seen as beneficial for Kāhui Ako without the stringent structures. The way Kāhui Ako are structured needs freeing up and greater autonomy given to clusters to set up in a way that better suits their needs but still with good accessibility to resources.

Vertical integration of PD and teaching from primary to secondary will only strengthen outcomes for students. We have to be braver to overcome the doubts.

Too much bureaucracy/administration. Too 'leadership heavy'. Not the model the sector would have developed if we were given the opportunity.

The structure is flawed, in every respect. The goal is valid and important, but the reality of the structure means that it will not succeed as it should.

It is too early to tell how successful they might be.

Building the relationships between teachers in all the schools in our rural community has been really valuable. Sharing of data across the Kāhui Ako has been a great way for us all to develop an understanding of the needs of students within our community. Sharing PD opportunities has led to shared understanding across the schools within our community.

Trustees' views on Kāhui Ako

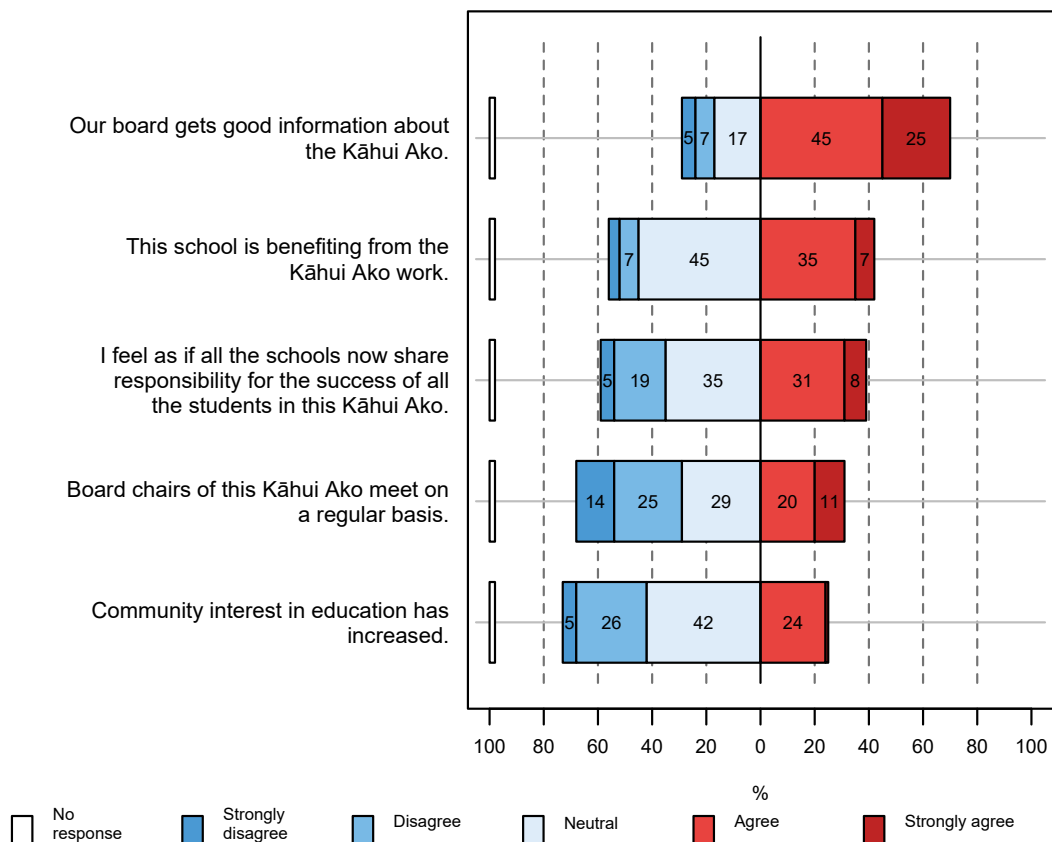
In the 2015 survey, we asked trustees if their school was interested in joining a Kāhui Ako. Three years later, we asked if their school belonged to a Kāhui Ako, and if so, how well this was working.

The majority of trustees responding to the survey are in a school that belongs to a Kāhui Ako (80%). These trustees were asked to what extent they agreed with five statements about this Kāhui Ako (see Figure 45).

Most trustees from a school in a Kāhui Ako agree their board gets good information about it

Most trustees from a school in a Kāhui Ako agree their board gets good information (70%). There is less agreement about all other aspects, with 42% of trustees agreeing (and 45% neutral) that the school is benefiting from the Kāhui Ako work. Again, this may be because many Kāhui Ako are just getting going. Less than a third say the board chairs of their Kāhui Ako meet on a regular basis.

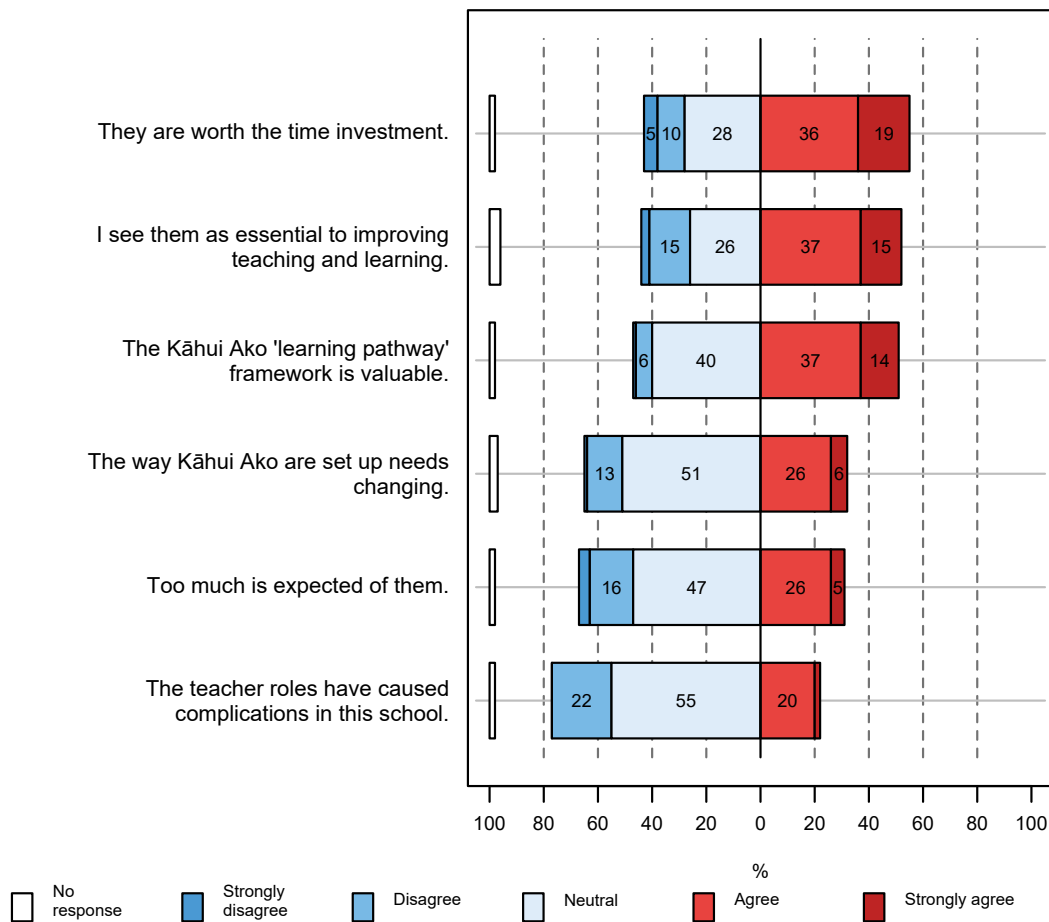
FIGURE 45 Trustees' views of their Kāhui Ako (n = 110)



Over half the trustees from a school in a Kāhui Ako agree that Kāhui Ako are worth the time investment

In a second question, trustees were asked to what extent they agreed with six statements about Kāhui Ako overall. Over half of the trustees agree that Kāhui Ako are worth the time investment, are essential to improving teaching and learning, and that the learning pathway framework is valuable. For the other three items that are more about the operation of the Kāhui Ako, around half of trustees selected the neutral option, perhaps because they do not know, or do not have a strong view.

FIGURE 46 Trustees' views of Kāhui Ako overall, reported by trustees from schools in Kāhui Ako (n = 110)



Summary and discussion

Schools interact and collaborate with many other schools and organisations in their community. Joint work between schools is most commonly initiated at the principal level, with principals sharing and reflecting on leadership practice. Most principals also report that their school visits other schools to learn from others (up considerably since 2015), and shares PLD. Kāhui Ako may be having an impact here. Interactions between schools and post-school education providers are common. Most principals also report their school interacts with local employers and community organisations.

Nearly 60% of the principals report that the school has discussions with iwi about how best to provide for Māori students. A minority of principals report that the school interacts with local iwi in other ways, suggesting there is considerable opportunity for secondary schools and iwi to work together more. Some principals say they would like more support with this. This is the first time we have asked about interactions with local iwi, and these data will be a useful baseline.

In 2015, we sought people's expectations for Kāhui Ako. The 2018 survey was the first to include a close look at their impact on schools and students, again setting an important baseline. Most schools whose principals responded to the survey are in a Kāhui Ako and principals report some benefits to being involved, including principals supporting each other more, and principals having a greater understanding of the needs of the community. It is early days for many Kāhui Ako, and involvement in a Kāhui Ako has yet to lead to changes within the school or for students for many. There were no decile-related or location-related differences in principals' views on Kāhui Ako.

Principals are most positive about the learning pathway that is enabled by Kāhui Ako, but under half agree that the time investment is worth it, and many principals think that the way Kāhui Ako are set up needs changing. This was borne out in their comments. Alongside this, a sizeable proportion of principals selected the neutral response to questions about Kāhui Ako, adding weight to the view that it is too soon to see some of these things happening. Although there are signs of progress towards some of the expectations expressed as Kāhui Ako were getting underway in 2015, others have yet to be realised.