

# 9.

## Parent and whānau perspectives

**The parent and whānau surveys represent a cross-section of all parents of secondary school students in New Zealand, with sufficient numbers of parents with different social characteristics, such as ethnicity and qualification levels, to check for differences in experiences and views.<sup>65</sup>**

Looking at the characteristics of the 1,242 parents and whānau who responded, most were women (82%). Age-wise, the biggest group was between the ages of 40 and 49 (57%), with a further 27% between 50 and 59 years. Seventy-five percent identified themselves as NZ European/Pākehā, 10% as Māori, 8% as Asian and 4% as Pasifika. An additional 12% of parents and whānau identified with other ethnicities, including African, Middle Eastern, Latin American, European, 'New Zealander' and 'Kiwi'. Three percent chose not to answer this question. Approximately 36% had degree qualifications (in metropolitan schools, a slightly higher 42% of the parents had degrees). Five percent of all respondents had no formal qualification.

The survey comprised mostly closed-response questions focused on their youngest child at the school (if they had more than one child there, as did 28% of parents<sup>66</sup>). Twelve percent of parents indicated they had a child in Year 7 or 8<sup>67</sup>; around 26% had a child in Year 9, 10 or 11; 22% had a child in Year 12; and 16% had a child in Year 13 or above.

65 Parent and whānau surveys were sent to 32 schools, along with guidelines for distributing them randomly to every fifth family with a student attending the school. These schools were an approximately representative sample of all New Zealand state and state-integrated secondary schools. Approximately one-quarter of the surveys were completed, resulting in returns that do not replicate our original school sample. This gives an under-representation of parents with a child at a decile 1–2 school. Details of the school characteristics with which the parent sample is associated are included in Appendix 1.

66 Twenty-three percent of parents had two children at their school, 4% had three children there and 1% had four children or more at their school.

67 The secondary schools in the sample included Years 7–15 schools as well as Years 9–15.

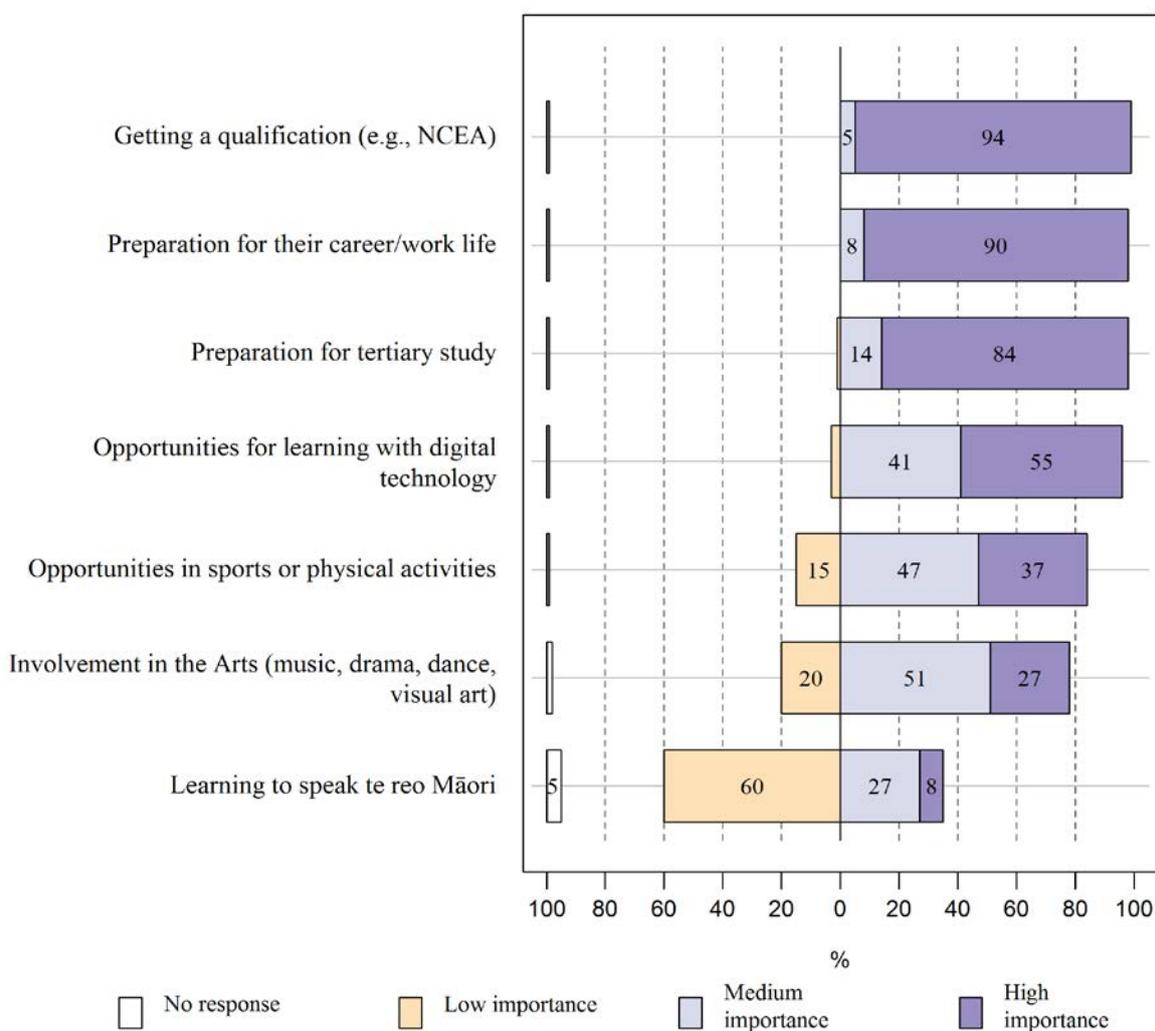
At the end of the survey, parents and whānau were given an opportunity to add a comment about their youngest child’s schooling. Around one-third of parents and whānau ( $n = 405$ ) wrote comments, some of which are included throughout this chapter to further illustrate their perspectives.

Throughout the survey, responses given by parents and whānau varied most often according to the decile and location of the schools their children were attending. In some instances, parents’ ethnicity was also a factor. These differences are reported, where relevant.

### What’s important to parents and whānau?

In 2015 we asked a new question of parents and whānau: the things that were important to them for their child’s education at the secondary school they attended. Of highest importance to parents and whānau was that their child got a qualification and was prepared for their career/work life and tertiary study, followed by opportunities to learn with digital technology, in sport or physical education, and in the arts. Learning to speak te reo Māori was of medium–high importance for 35% of parents and whānau.

FIGURE 42 Parent and whānau views of what’s important for their child’s education at their school ( $n = 1,242$ )



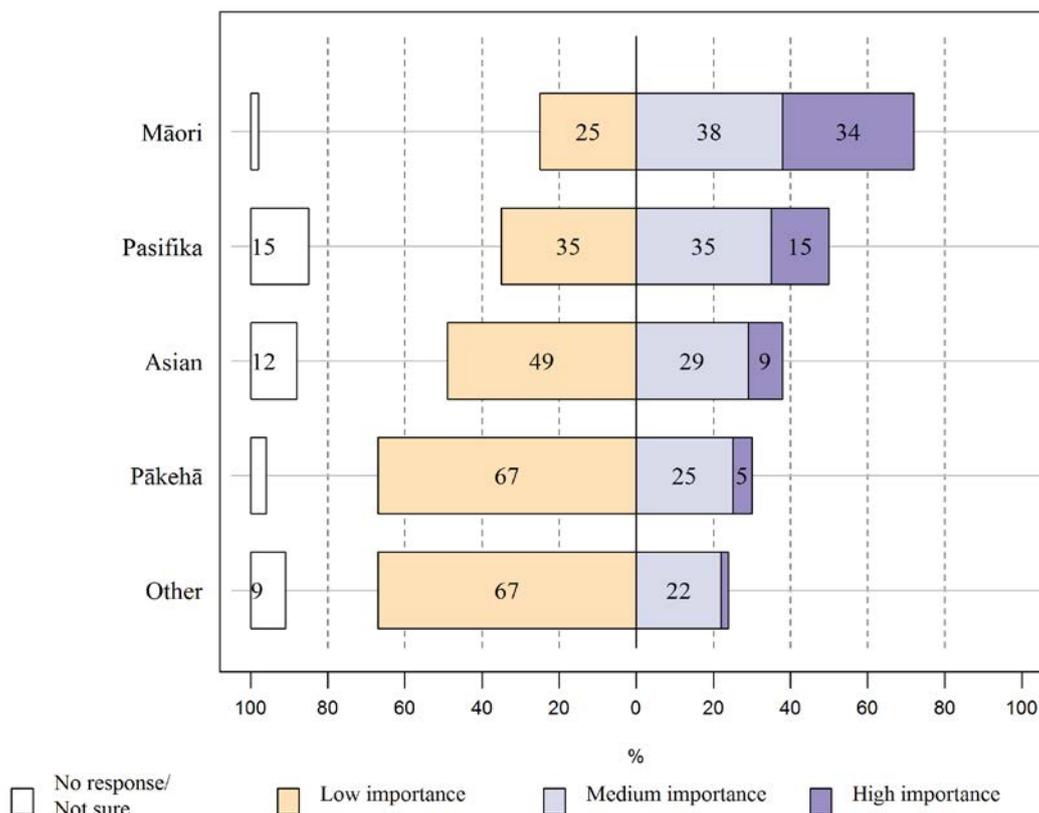
### Te Reo Māori

In NZC there is a clear expectation that every English-medium school will include te reo Māori in its curriculum. The provision of opportunities to learn and use te reo Māori is particularly important for meeting the needs of Māori students, most of whom attend English-medium schools.

Bright (2015)<sup>68</sup> found that the extent to which English-medium schools provide learning opportunities that support Māori students’ identity, language and culture varies according to the proportion of Māori students in a school; those with a greater proportion of Māori students have better provision. This was reflected in the survey responses from parents and whānau. Forty-five percent of those who had a child at a school where Māori students were more than 30% of the roll thought learning to speak te reo Māori was of medium or high importance for their child’s education (compared with 35% of all parents).

The importance placed on their child learning te reo Māori was also related to the ethnicity with which parents and whānau identified (see Figure 43). For almost three-quarters of Māori parents and whānau, this was of medium or high importance.

FIGURE 43 Parent and whānau views of the importance of their children learning to speak te reo Māori at school, by prioritised ethnicity (n = 1,242)



68 Bright, N., with Wylie, C. (2015). *Ngā whakararanga mo ngā ākonga Māori i roto i ngā kura auraki: He kaupapa nui te tokoiti, tokomaha rānei i ngā ākonga Māori? Providing for Māori students in English-medium schools: Do Māori student numbers matter?* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Elsewhere in the survey, parents and whānau were asked how well they thought their child's secondary school helped their youngest child at the school to learn and speak te reo Māori. Differences associated with parent and whānau ethnicity, school decile and location were evident. Fifty-seven percent of whānau who identified themselves as Māori thought their child's school was doing well or very well with helping their child learn and speak te reo Māori. Almost the same proportion of Pasifika parents gave the same response, with 42% of NZ European/Pākehā parents, 38% of Asian parents and 29% of parents of other ethnicities sharing this view. The 57% of Māori parents who thought their child's school was doing well here is some distance behind the 72% of Māori parents who rated their child learning te reo as of medium to high importance. Parents with children at decile 3–4 schools were more likely to rate their school as doing well or very well with helping them learn te reo Māori (57%, compared with 39–44% for other decile bands), as were those with children at schools in towns (51%, compared with around 40% for schools in small cities and metropolitan schools).

Differences were also evident in the importance Māori parents placed on co-curricular opportunities; 53% of Māori parents indicated their child having opportunities in sports and physical activities was of high importance, compared with 35% of non-Māori parents. Māori whānau were also more likely to rate involvement in the Arts as of high importance (37%, compared with 26%).

Parents' ethnicity made no significant difference to the importance they placed on their children gaining a qualification and preparing for tertiary study and their career/work life, and having opportunities for learning with digital technology.

## School choice

Most parents and whānau (89%) said their youngest child attending secondary school was at their first choice of school, the same as in 2012. Parents of children at decile 7–10 schools were most likely to have their child attending their first choice of school (91%, decreasing to 77% for those with a child at a decile 1–2 school). In 2012 a greater proportion of parents with a child at a decile 1–2 school reported their child being at their first choice of school (82%), with the figure for decile 9–10 similar to 2015 (91%).

Overall, 7% said their child attended a school that was not their first choice, similar to the 9% in 2012 and somewhat lower than the 11% in 2009. Parents and whānau whose child attended a school that was not their first choice were most likely to have a child at a decile 1–2 school (18%, decreasing to 3% for those with a child at a decile 9–10 school). Overlapping somewhat with the association with school decile was parents' ethnicity. Māori whānau were least likely to have their children attend their first choice of school; 16% of Māori parents had not got their first choice of school, compared with 5% of NZ European/Pākehā parents.

The main reasons given for not attending parents' first choice of school were that the child did not want to attend the school their parents desired for them (39% of this group), the school had an enrolment zone that the family lived beyond (36%), cost (32%) and lack of transport (20%). Transport had proven a barrier for some parents with a child at a decile 1–2 school (43%) or a decile 5–6 school (14%), but for no parents with a child at a school in another decile band. Enrolment zones were more likely to prevent Asian parents and those with a child attending a decile 5–10 school from sending their youngest child to their first choice of secondary school.

A higher percentage of parents' first school of choice in 2015 was also their closest school (60%, up from 49% in 2012).<sup>69</sup> This was most likely to be the case for parents whose child attended a school in a town

<sup>69</sup> In 2015, the sample of schools whose parents and whānau participated included a slightly smaller proportion of metropolitan schools (where enrolment zones are more common) than in 2012, so this should be interpreted with caution.

(81%, compared with 68% of those whose child was at a school in a small city, and 50% of those with a child at a metropolitan school). Correspondingly, fewer parents' first school of choice was not their closest school (29%, down from 40% in 2012).

How did parents and whānau access their first choice of school? Fifty-five percent lived within the school zone, up slightly from 49% in 2012. Fourteen percent of the families chose schools without an enrolment zone, with higher proportions of those in towns and with a child at a small school. Nineteen percent met the special character criteria for their school, the same as 2012. This was more likely to apply to parents with children at high-decile schools (37%, decreasing to zero for decile 1–2 schools), medium-large schools (31%, decreasing to 3% for small schools and zero at large schools) and at metropolitan schools (24%). The proportion who went into the ballot for the school (6%) or had been on the priority list for the school (3%) had each dropped somewhat from the 2012 national survey figures (from 14% and 5%, respectively). Students drawn from a ballot or on a priority list were more likely to attend high-decile schools (around 7% of parents with a child at a decile 7–10 school, decreasing to none at decile 1–2 schools). Those drawn from a ballot were also more likely to have a child at a large school (14%, decreasing to none with a child at a small school). Eight percent of parents indicated there were other reasons their children attended the schools they did, such as having older siblings there or because it was the only local school.

We asked parents where they got information to help them choose a secondary school for their youngest child. Two-thirds of families visited the school or attended the school's open day—a marked increase from just over half in 2012. Other information sources included:

- school prospectus (29%)
- school website (23%—an increase from 15% in 2012, and 10% in 2009)
- most recent ERO review of the school (18%—a decrease from 25% in 2012)
- word of mouth from family and friends, and having an immediate family member at the school (each 14%)
- the media (e.g., newspaper, Stuff), school annual report and 'Find a School' website (each 6% or less).

Factors that helped parents and whānau decide on their child's school were more likely to include the child's own preference and having family and friends at the school (currently or in the past) than characteristics of the school itself. Factors that informed parents' school choice included:

- the child wanting to attend that school (54% of parents, and a slightly higher 62% for parents with a child at a large school and 60% for those with children at metropolitan schools)
- an older child or other family members having attended the school (53%—up from 43% in 2012, and 40% in 2009)
- a child's friends going to the school (35%—up slightly from 31% at the last two surveys)
- the school's academic results (35%, and a higher 44% for Asian parents)
- the views of parents and whānau they know (32%—down from 38% in 2012 and 36% in 2009)
- opportunities in sports or physical activities (19%)
- the school's Arts programmes (11%)
- primary/intermediate teachers' views (10%)
- the convenience of the school's location (10%)
- the school's cultural inclusiveness (9%)
- digital technology opportunities (8%, and 16% of parents with a child at a large school)
- the school's te reo Māori and tikanga Māori programme (2%, and a higher 13% for Māori whānau).

Eleven percent of respondents had other reasons that included the special character of the school (3%) and whether it was a co-educational or single-sex school (2%).

School location was related to some different patterns. Parents and whānau with children at metropolitan schools were most likely to visit the school, and get information from the school website or prospectus. When deciding on a school, they were also the most likely to consider every factor reported above, except one: 50% of parents and whānau with children at metropolitan schools were influenced by an older child or other family members who went there, compared with 54% of those linked with schools in small cities and 60% of those with schools in towns.

We compared what parents and whānau said is important to them for their children's education, and what they said helped them decide on the school they chose, where it seemed reasonable to hypothesise links between items (see Table 40). While for almost all parents and whānau, getting a qualification was of high importance for their child's education, a much lower 35% of parents said the school's academic results helped them to decide on the school their child attended. Not all students will take an academic pathway to gaining a qualification, so a school's academic results may not be seen by parents as a good indicator of students getting qualifications at that school. However, for each of the pairs of items in Table 40, the percentages of parents who said these factors helped them choose their child's school were at least half those that rated the same things as of high importance. This is perhaps explained by the greater influence on parents' choice of the child's school preference and their family and friends' attendance at the school, than school characteristics. Alternatively, parents might expect *all* schools to treat these things as important.

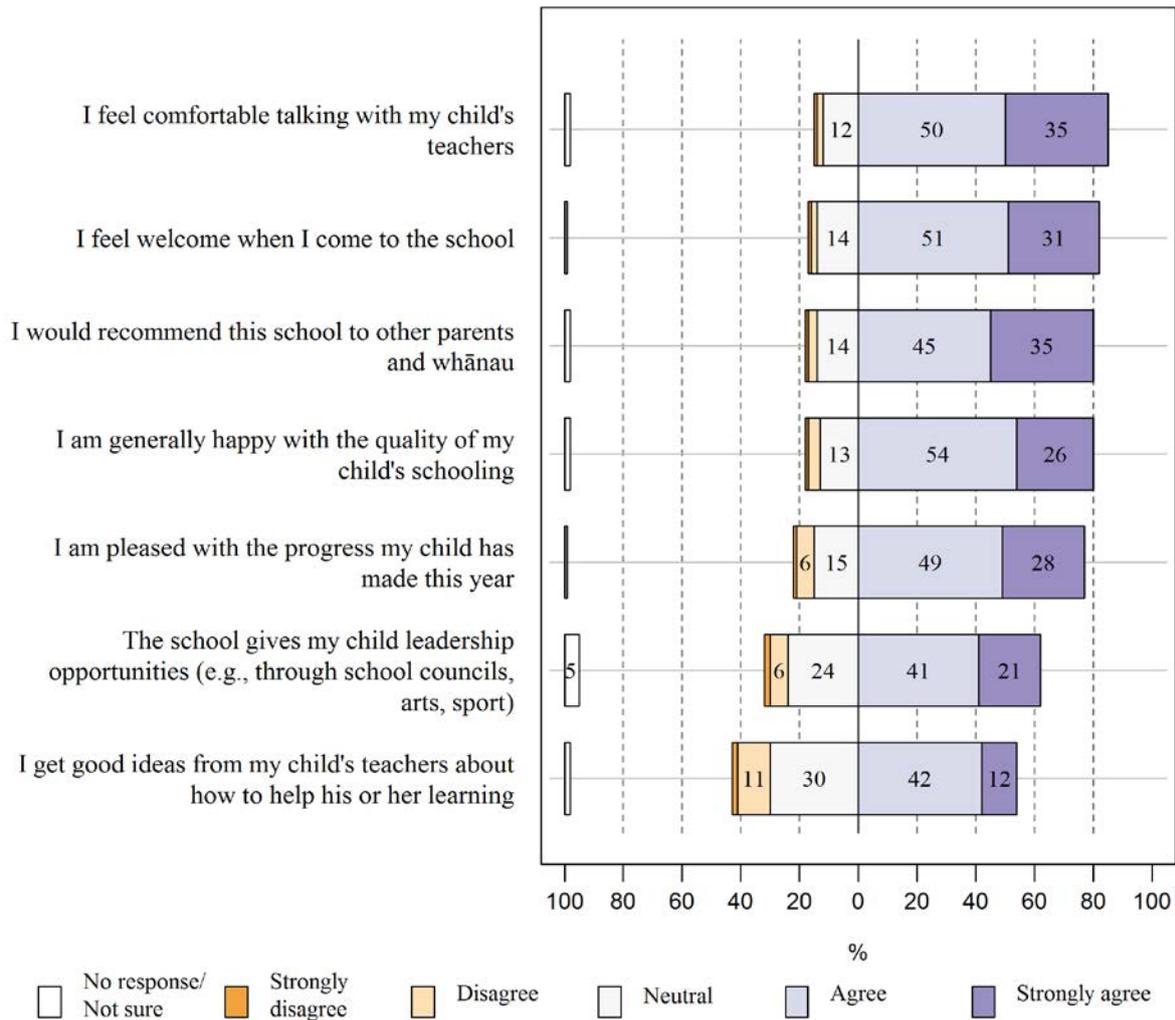
TABLE 40 **Comparison of parent and whānau views about things that are important for their children's education with things that helped them decide on a school (n = 1,242)**

What's important for your child's education at this school?	Rated this as being of high importance %	Helped them decide on this school %	What helped you decide on this school for this child? %
Getting a qualification (e.g., NCEA)	94	35	School's academic results
Opportunities for learning with digital technology	55	8	Digital technology opportunities
Opportunities in sports or physical activities	37	19	Opportunities in sports or physical activities
Involvement in the Arts (music, drama, dance, visual art)	27	11	School's Arts programmes (music, dance, drama, visual arts)
Learning to speak te reo Māori	8	2	School's te reo Māori and tikanga Māori programme

## How is their child's school doing?

Overall, 80% of parents and whānau indicated they were generally happy with the quality of their children's schooling, similar to 2012 and 2009. The responses in Figure 44 also show that most parents were comfortable with visiting the school and talking with their child's teachers, and agreed they would recommend the school to others. Slightly fewer parents agreed their child was being given leadership opportunities, or that they got good ideas from their child's teachers about how to help their child's learning (although the latter was up to 54% from 48% agreeing or strongly agreeing in 2012). Response patterns for other items that were also included in 2012 were much the same in 2015.

FIGURE 44 Parent and whānau feelings about their child's secondary school (n = 1,242)

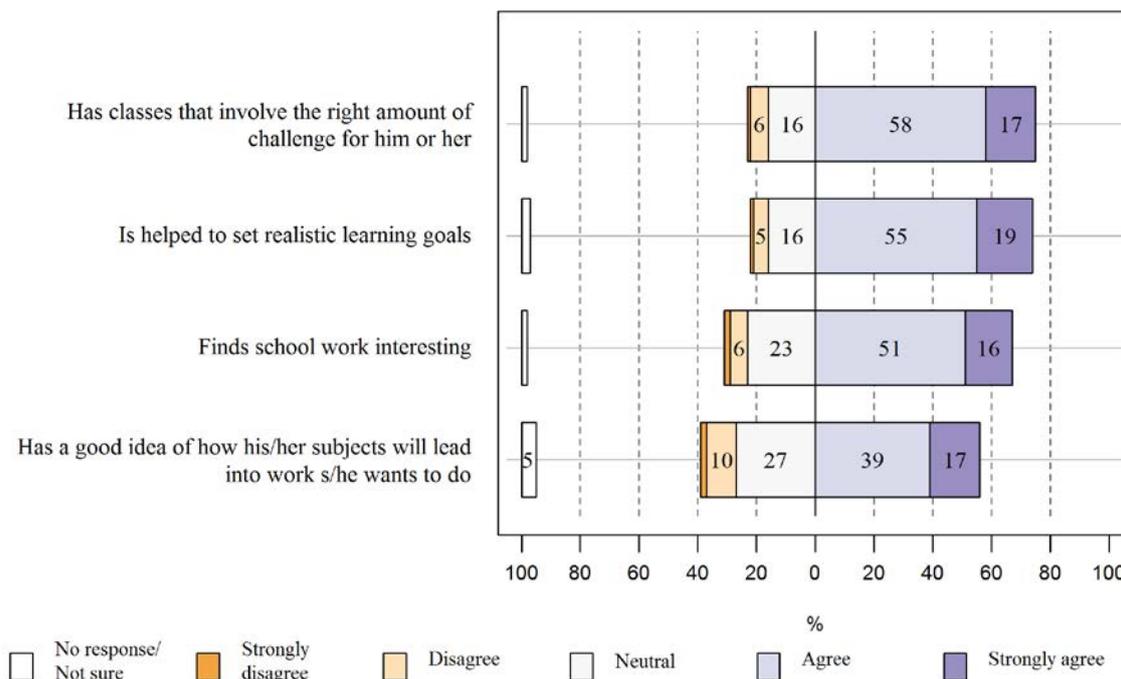


Responses to the items in Figure 44 from parents and whānau with children at a decile 3–4 school tended to be less positive than those of other decile bands. Parents with children at decile 9–10 schools were most likely to agree they would recommend the school to other parents and whānau (83%, decreasing to 62% of parents with children at decile 1–2 schools).

Checking for differences associated with school location, we noticed that parents with children attending schools in towns were generally less sanguine in their responses to this set of questions than those whose children attended schools in small cities or metropolitan schools.

Parents were asked about specific aspects of their child's education and wellbeing at school. Some of these responses are reported in *Chapter 5: Supporting students' wellbeing*. In general, there was evidence of improvement since 2012. For example, there were increases of between 7 and 10% for the three top-rating items in Figure 45, suggesting that in 2015 larger proportions of students were challenged sufficiently to find school work interesting, and were working towards realistic goals. However, just over half the parents thought their child had a good idea of how their subjects would lead into the career they wanted.

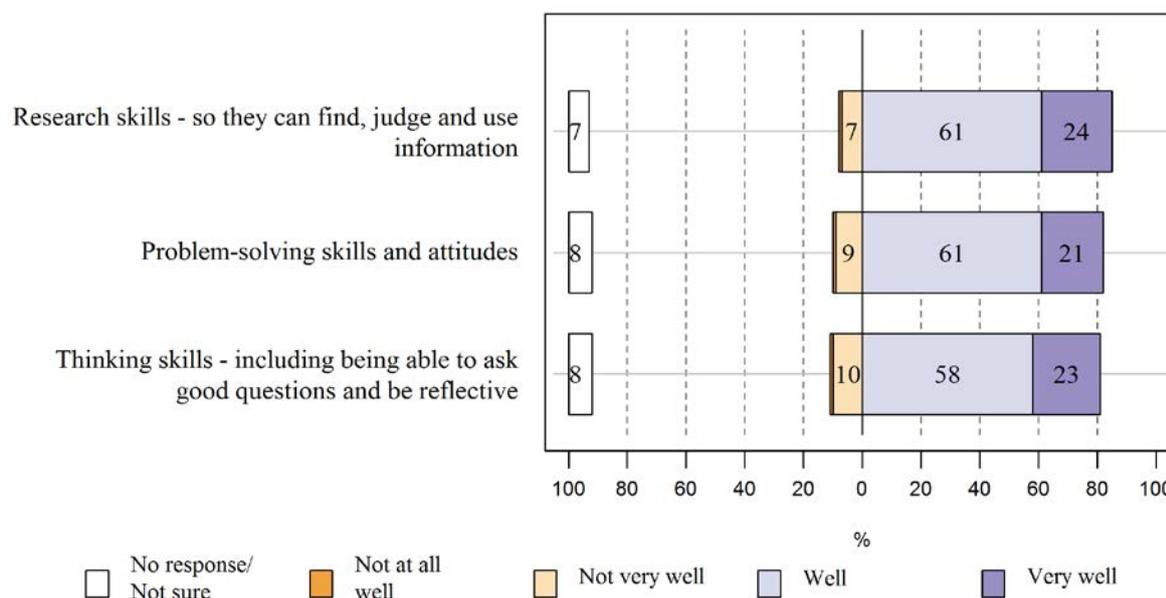
FIGURE 45 Parent and whānau views of their youngest child’s experience at this school (n = 1,242)



Looking at school decile, parents and whānau with children at decile 1–2 schools were most likely to agree their child has a good idea of how their subjects will lead into work they want to do (77%, decreasing to 53% for decile 9–10 schools). This might be a reflection of how we worded this item; it is possible that more parents of children at high-decile schools anticipate their children’s subjects leading into tertiary study than leading (directly) into work. The same pattern was not evident in 2012.

Figure 46 shows that the majority of parents and whānau thought their child’s school did well or very well at helping their child develop research skills, problem-solving skills and attitudes, and thinking skills.

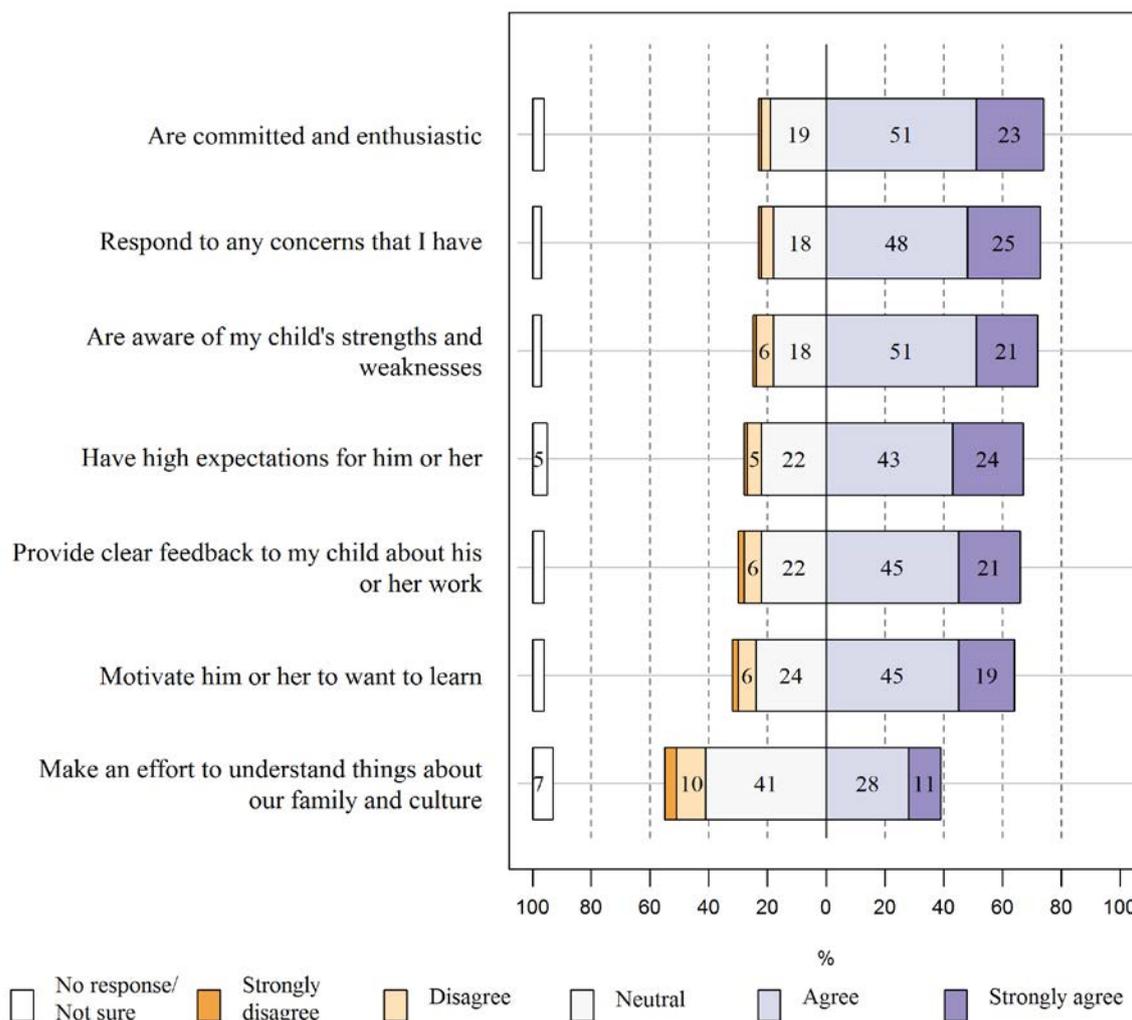
FIGURE 46 How well the school helps develop thinking, problem-solving and research skills; parent and whānau views ( $n = 1,242$ )



Most parents and whānau were positive about the role their child's teachers played in supporting their learning (see Figure 47), agreeing their teachers were committed and enthusiastic, and responsive to parents' concerns. There were lower levels of agreement that their teachers make an effort to understand things about their family and culture (39%, down slightly from 43% in 2012). Pasifika parents were most likely to agree with this (56%), followed by Asian parents (47%), Māori parents and whānau (42%), NZ European parents (36%) and parents of other ethnicities (also 36%).

Compared with 2012, the biggest difference was in the proportion who agreed their child's teachers motivate them to want to learn, which was 64% in 2015 (compared with 72% in 2012, but similar to 65% in 2009). There were two other small differences. The proportion agreeing their child's teachers respond to any concerns they have was higher (73%, compared with 68% in 2012 and 63% in 2009). Slightly fewer parents agreed their child's teachers make an effort to understand things about their family and culture (38%, compared with 43% in 2012 and 33% in 2009).

FIGURE 47 Parent and whānau views of their youngest child's teachers at this school (n = 1,242)



As a group, Pasifika parents tended to give the most positive responses to the items in Figure 47, but this should be interpreted with caution, as the number of respondents in this group was relatively small (n = 48). Asian parents were the most likely to agree their child has a good idea of how their subjects will lead into work they want to do (71%, compared with 52% of NZ European/Pākehā parents). NZ European/Pākehā parents were the most likely to think their child's teachers are aware of their child's strengths and weaknesses (74% agreed they were, compared with around 68% of non-NZ European/Pākehā parents).

There were consistently fewer positive responses to this set of items from parents with children at decile 3–4 schools. For example, 58% of those with a child attending these schools agreed their teachers have high expectations for them, compared with 70% for decile 9–10 schools.

The comments parents and whānau wrote at the end of their surveys contribute to an overall picture of what they thought about their child's schooling. Positive comments about the school or their child's experience there were the most frequently made (13% of all parents). Five percent also wrote positive comments about their children's teachers or school principal:

I have found [this] to be an excellent school. It is extremely well run and I would recommend it to any parent. I cannot speak highly enough about the staff and am very grateful both of my children were educated at such an outstanding educational institution.

We have always been happy with how this school operates and how it delivers its curriculum. Its standards are high, and there is excellent communication from teachers when it is warranted.

This school provides a generally safe learning environment which encourages excellence in the individual ability of the child, be it academic or practically based skills. The principal's leadership is strong and his inclusive approach has created a school community with values and respect. We have had 2 children through this school and in general we are pleased with the care, results and learning teachers have provided.

There were smaller proportions of critical comments about staff members (4%) and about the school or their child's experience there (1%):

This last year for my youngest has been diabolical. He has not been motivated to do work, had an English teacher that kept picking on him (that didn't get sorted until the end of the second term). Constant meetings with school, then school not following through with him to keep motivation up. He will be lucky to even get NCEA Level 2. I understand the child needs to do the work but the teachers have just given up on him! Not like teachers used to be who were passionate to help their students.

The school my daughter attends is a very unwelcoming school. I had 2 boys at 2 different boys' high schools and I always felt welcome there but not at this school. And I'm not sure why, but it just doesn't have a good feeling about it. I also attended this school years ago and I loved it there.

Issues around school culture were also identified in the comments made by a small proportion (2%) of parents and whānau:

Really disappointed with the way some staff talk to the kids—little respect—unless the kid is perceived well by the tutor. One of my children is quiet and often his peers take advantage of him, this happens to others and staff don't address it.

Every year the children of parents who teach at this college get the prizes. Unfair. College A [sports team] and Rugby 1st 15 get priority over every other sport in the school i.e., school vans, changing other games to accommodate these two sports.

Currently there seems to be a lot of bullying, smoking and even drug use.

### Costs and participation

The 2015 survey included a new question about whether cost had prevented their child's participation in school activities. Twenty percent of the parents and whānau who responded to the survey reported that cost had prevented their child from participating in one or more of these activities:

- overseas trip for a particular subject/class (13%)
- sport (5%)
- camp (5%)
- selecting a subject/class (e.g., technology) that they wanted to do (4%)
- field trip (2%)
- cultural activity (2%).

A higher percentage of parents and whānau with children at decile 1–2 schools reported cost had been a barrier for their child selecting a subject or class that they wanted to do (8%, decreasing to 2% for decile 9–10 schools). For 21% of those with children at decile 1–2 schools, cost had meant their child had been unable to go on an overseas trip for a particular subject. For decile 3–6, the proportion was 10%, and for

decile 7–10, 14%. Parents with a child at a large school were more likely to report their child had been unable to go on an overseas trip for a particular class (16%, decreasing to zero for those with a child at a small school).

## School information for parents and whānau

In this section we look at the nature of information parents and whānau receive from the school, whether the information is on paper or electronic and how often they refer to it. We also explore where parents source information about their school and education in general.

### Information about their child

Most parents indicated that the information they received about their child’s attendance and progress was good or very good (see Figure 48). Information about their child’s behaviour, what they needed to do to achieve the qualification they would like and the connections between what their child’s current subjects and options in tertiary study and employment were not so well rated, with relatively high proportions of parents either indicating they were unsure about these or not responding.

FIGURE 48 Quality of information from the school about their child; parent and whānau views (n = 1,242)



There has been a steady increase in the proportion of parents who rated as good or very good the information they got from the school about their child's progress (74%, compared with 63% in 2012 and 53% in 2009). A small increase was evident also in the proportion of parents who said the school gave them good or very good information on what their child needs to do to achieve the qualification they would like (47%, compared with 41% in 2012). This was the only information for which a school decile-related difference was shown: 64% of parents with a child at a decile 1–2 school rated as good or very good the information they received about what their child needs to do to achieve the qualification they would like (decreasing to 41% for those with a child at a decile 9–10 school).

School location was associated with some differences. Parents and whānau whose child attended a secondary school in a small city were the most likely to rate as good or very good the quality of information they receive about their child's progress (84%, compared with 76% of those with a child at a metropolitan school, and 67% of those with a child at a town school). A similar pattern was apparent for attendance information: 86% of parents with a child at a school in a small city rated this as good or very good, as did 83% of those with a child at a metropolitan school, and 77% of those with a child at a town school.

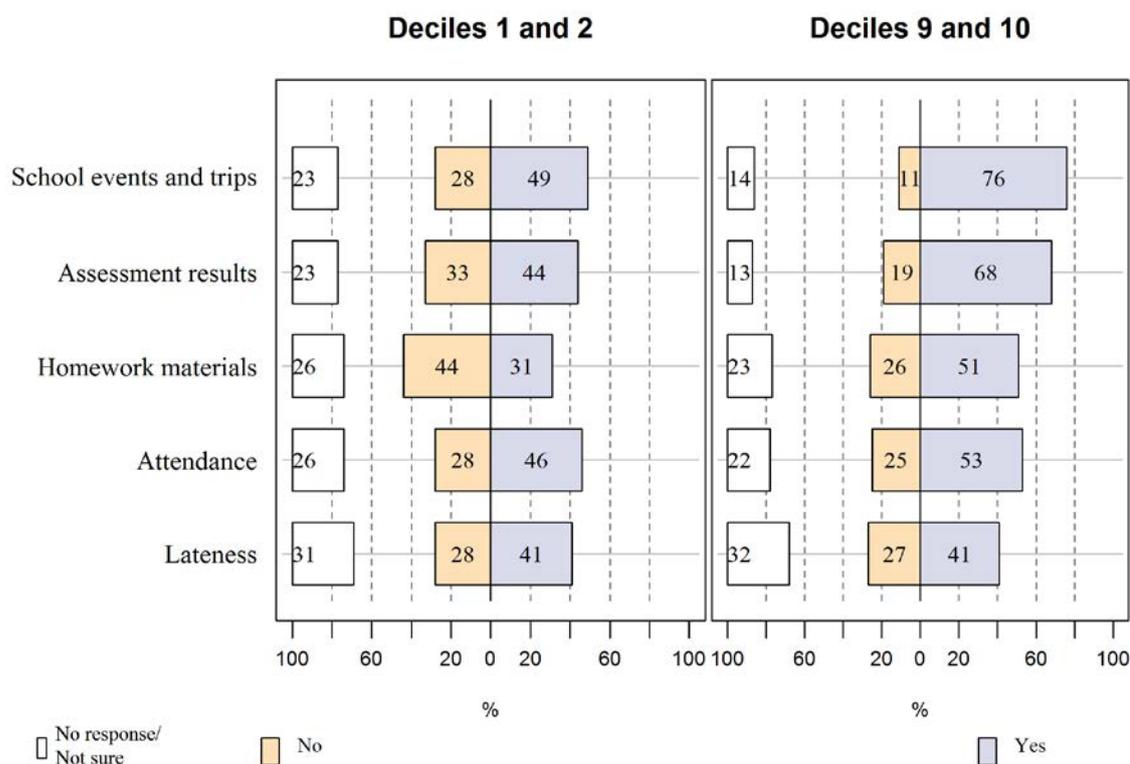
Just under two-thirds of the parents and whānau had electronic access to information about school events and trips, and assessment results, as shown in Table 41. A significant minority did not know if they had electronic access to the information we asked about.

TABLE 41 **Parent and whānau electronic access to school information (n = 1,242)**

Information on:	Yes %	No %	Not sure %
School events and trips	64	17	18
Assessment results	63	19	17
Attendance	57	22	20
Lateness	47	25	26
Homework materials	44	28	26

As Figure 49 shows, those most likely to have electronic access to this information had children at decile 9–10 schools, other than for lateness. Parents' electronic access generally increased with school decile, with the responses shown here representing either end of a continuum. Although parents with a child at a decile 1–2 or a decile 9–10 school reported similar electronic access to lateness information, the proportions were higher for the intervening decile bands: the figure for decile 3–4 was 51%, decile 5–6 was 46% and decile 7–8 was also 51%. There was no significant difference associated with school decile for electronic access to a child's attendance information.

FIGURE 49 Parent and whānau electronic access to information from school; deciles 1-2 and 9-10



Looking at school location, parents and whānau with children at schools in towns had the lowest rates of electronic access to student-related information, and those with children at schools in small cities reported the highest rate. For example, assessment and attendance information could be accessed electronically by 52% and 42% (respectively) of parents and whānau connected with schools in towns, compared with 79% and 75% of those with children at schools in small cities. It is not surprising then, that those whose children were at schools in small cities also electronically accessed their child’s information more often.

The proportion of parents and whānau with electronic access to school information about their child increased with school size. Seven percent of parents with a child at a small school<sup>70</sup> said they have electronic access to their child’s attendance information, increasing to 74% of those with a child at a large school. Likewise, 21% of those with a child at a small school had electronic access to their child’s assessment results, increasing to 71% for large schools.

Perhaps because they were of more immediate concern than other information types, information regarding homework materials, and school events and trips had the highest rates of weekly access and were accessed at least once a term by 66% and 70% of the parents and whānau who had electronic access (see Table 42). But the information that saw the greatest percentage of parents accessing it at least once a term was assessment information (73%). This is consistent with what parents and whānau said about the importance for their child of gaining qualifications. Attendance and lateness were the information types most likely to be accessed less often than once per term by parents.

70 The number of parents with a child at a small school was 29, so we report their response rates only where there is a clear trend across all school sizes.

TABLE 42 Frequency of accessing electronic information about their child, by parents and whānau who had access

Information on:	At least weekly	Three to nine times per term	Once or twice per term	Less than once per term
	%	%	%	%
Homework materials	21	18	27	31
School events and trips	17	24	29	26
Attendance	13	15	29	41
Lateness	13	14	24	44
Assessment results	8	22	43	25

There were some school decile-related differences in the types of information that parents who had electronic access accessed most frequently.<sup>71</sup> Forty-five percent of parents with a child at a decile 9–10 school reported accessing homework materials at least three times per term, and 44% accessed information about school events and trips with similar frequency. Parents with a child at a decile 7–8 school were the group that were most likely to access assessment information at least three times a term (33% did so).

Parents who had electronic access to their child’s attendance information were more than twice as likely as those who did not to report the information was very good (62% and 48%, respectively).

Those who did not have electronic access to information about their child from the school ranged from 17% (information about school events and trips) to 28% (homework materials). Similar proportions indicated they did not know whether they had electronic access to the various types of information discussed here.

Another source of information about their child was discussions with staff members. Parents received their surveys part-way through Term 3, so would have had opportunities during that school year to meet with teachers and other staff members to talk about their child’s progress. Many parents and whānau had had a discussion with their child’s subject teachers (67%) or form teacher/tutor teacher/academic mentor (61%)—similar to 2012. In both cases, more than two-thirds of these discussions included their child—slightly more than previously. There was a decrease in the percentage of parents who reported they had had a discussion with a dean (26%, down from 36% in 2012). Twelve percent of parents had had a discussion with the principal or deputy principal (around 24% for parents with a child at a small or small-medium school, decreasing to 7% for those whose child was at a large school), 8% with a careers adviser and 7% with a guidance counsellor. Overall, parents continued to discuss their child’s progress most often with their teachers, and slightly more of these conversations were including the child.

Parents and whānau whose child was at a decile 1–2 school were more likely to have discussed their child’s progress with their form teacher (82%, decreasing to 60% for decile 9–10 schools) and with the principal or deputy principal (21%, decreasing to 9%). Those whose children attended high-decile schools are more likely to have talked to their children’s subject teacher(s) (74% for decile 9–10 schools, decreasing to 49% for decile 3–4 schools and 59% for decile 1–2 schools).

School location was also related to the discussions parents and whānau had with school staff about their children’s progress. Those whose children went to schools in small cities were the most likely to have discussed their children’s progress with subject teachers (81%, including 62% who involved their children

<sup>71</sup> For some of these items, there were fewer than 20 parents with a child at a decile 1–2 school who had electronic access, so here we report trends that were evident across the decile bands.

in these discussions). Parents and whānau with children at schools in towns were twice as likely as those whose children went to metropolitan schools to have had a discussion about their child’s progress with the principal or their deputy (19%, compared with 9%).

The comments 4% of parents wrote at the end of their survey reflected a view that some schools needed to improve the ways in which parent–teacher discussions were run, and improve their interactions with parents and whānau:

The Parent/Teacher meetings are a shambles. Teachers don’t stick to the 5 min time slots; parents arrive late & expect to push in & this year I had an appointment with a teacher who didn’t turn up.

With the exception of a couple, I have personally found teachers at [the school] unapproachable, in fact I’m yet to meet one of my child’s actual classroom teachers as parent/teacher interviews are held solely with your child’s academic mentor who in many cases doesn’t even teach your child.

Parent communication is abysmal and I do not feel there is any interest in either keeping parents informed or dealing with issues professionally or appropriately. At times inquiries are totally and completely ignored. At other times direct inquiry by a parent is not replied to the parent and the child is dragged into it. There is little or no respect in some instances for the parent’s wishes, or even acknowledgement that the parent is the most influential person in a child’s life and therefore communication is paramount.

## Information about the school

To get up-to-date information about the school, parents and whānau were using the sources shown in Table 43. Compared with 2012, more parents were getting information about the school via emailed newsletters, rather than paper newsletters. However, fewer parents were looking at their school’s latest ERO report or annual report. The number using these as a source of information about their child’s school is very low, particularly in view of the expectation in the consultation on the Update of the Educational Act that these are prime information sources for parents and would give them more agency in their child’s education.

TABLE 43 Sources of information about their child’s school, reported by parents and whānau (n = 1,242)

Information sources	2012 (n = 1,477) %	2015 (n = 1,242) %
Newsletters emailed to me	66	76
School website	64	59
Newsletters on paper	43	30
Other parents and whānau	28	22
Local community newspaper	19	13
Latest ERO report	16	9
Annual report	13	7
“Find a School” website	*	5
Digital media	*	4
Class blog	2	3
Other	6	3

\*Not asked

Emailed newsletters were almost universal for parents at decile 9–10 schools (89%, compared with 18% for parents at decile 1–2 schools). The greater digital access of parents at decile 9–10 schools was also evident with 73% of these schools' parents and whānau getting information from the school website, decreasing to 26% of parents at decile 1–2 schools. Conversely, just 10% of decile 9–10 school parents got school information from paper newsletters, compared with 80% of parents with children at decile 1–2 schools.

School location was also related to different patterns for paper and email newsletters. Parents and whānau whose children attended schools in small cities were the most likely to receive school newsletters by email (92%, compared with 80% for those whose children attended metropolitan schools, and 59% of parents whose children attended schools in towns). Parents with children at schools in towns were the most likely to receive paper newsletters (52%).

Parents with children attending schools in towns were more likely to get information about the school from local community newspapers (23%, compared with 8% for those with children at metropolitan schools). They were less likely to use the school website for up-to-date information (40%, compared with 72% of those with children at schools in small cities, and 65% of those with children at metropolitan schools).

Also associated with newsletter mode was school size. Parents and whānau with a child at a small–medium school were both the most likely group to receive paper newsletters (66% did so) and the least likely to receive newsletters via email (46%). Those with a child at a small school were also more likely to get information about their school from other parents and whānau (31%, decreasing to 14% for those with a child at a large school).

Also related to information about their child's school, in *Chapter 8: Trustee perspectives and the work of school boards*, we report an increase in the proportion of parents and whānau who felt genuinely consulted by their school about new directions or issues (47%, up from 41% in 2012, and 34% of parents in 2009).

### **Information about education**

The median number of information sources parents indicated they used to get information about education, other than through the school, decreased from four in 2009 and 2012 to three in 2015. Friends, newspapers and other parents and whānau, followed by Internet searches and family were the main sources of information about education in general (see Table 44), at somewhat lower proportions. Figures for use of the Ministry of Education have remained steady at 22% since 2009. There has been a decrease in the use of ERO as a general source. The use of traditionally paper-based information sources—newspapers, books and magazines—has showed clear downward trends since 2009.

TABLE 44 Main sources of information about education, reported by parents and whānau; 2009, 2012 and 2015

Main information sources	2009 (n = 1,877) %	2012 (n = 1,477) %	2015 (n = 1,242) %
Friends	55	52	50
Newspapers	61	53	48
Other parents and whānau	57	56	46
Internet searches	44	52	43
Family	48	43	42
TV	40	37	37
Ministry of Education	22	22	22
Radio	21	20	19
Education Review Office	25	28	18
Books	28	22	13
Magazines	21	16	11
Other	6	7	8
NZ School Trustees Assn.	*	*	4

\*Not asked

Declines in the number of sources used did not appear to be counterbalanced by an increase in getting information from alternative sources.

The small proportion of responses in the “Other” category did not shed any light on this. Half of these responses (4%) indicated parents and whānau had first-hand experience in education (e.g., were themselves teachers, or school trustees). Less than 1% of responses related to parents’ use of digital media such as Twitter and Facebook as one of their main sources of information.

Fewer parents with a connection to a decile 1–2 school used Internet searches as a main source of information (33%, increasing to 50% for decile 9–10). This echoes the decile-related difference in how parents and whānau get up-to-date information about their child’s school, described earlier.

Likewise, parents and whānau with children attending schools in towns were less likely to use Internet searches as a main source of information (33%, compared with 48% for metropolitan schools). Again, this is consistent with the school location patterns for getting information about the school.

School size was related to parents’ use of some information sources. Twenty-four percent of parents with a child at a small school used Internet searches to find out about education in general, increasing to 50% of those whose child attended a large school. Parents of children at small schools were more likely to indicate other parents and whānau were a main source of information (66%, decreasing to 40% of those with children at large schools).

## Parent and whānau involvement with their child's school

In Table 45 we compare parents' involvement with their child's school over the three most recent surveys of secondary schools. Since 2009, we can see increases in most of the aspects we asked about.

TABLE 45 Parent and whānau involvement with their child's secondary school; 2009, 2012 and 2015

Involvement	2009 (n = 1,877) %	2012 (n = 1,477) %	2015 (n = 1,242) %
Sports, attending	27	34	50
Responded to school survey(s)	23	37	43
Fundraising	19	28	32
School plays/choir/orchestra, etc., attending <sup>◇</sup>	13	21	26
School trips	14	13	20
Sports, coaching/helping	8	17	17
Consultation	7	9	10
PTA/school Council/BoT	5	4	6
Other	3	6	6
Kapa haka, attending <sup>*</sup>	*	*	5
School plays/choir/orchestra, etc., coaching/helping	3	6	4
Classroom help	1	1	2
Building repairs and maintenance	1	1	1
Kapa haka, coaching/helping <sup>*</sup>	*	*	1
Library, helping	1	<1	1
Supervision around grounds during school hours/duty	<1	<1	1
Canteen/school lunches	1	2	1

\* In 2009 and 2012, kapa haka was included with "School plays/choir/orchestra/kapa haka etc.," for both "attending" and "coaching/helping" items. In 2015, we asked about kapa haka separately.

\* Not asked.

◇ In 2009 and 2012 this item also included kapa haka.

School decile was associated with differences in parent and whānau involvement at school; with those with a child at a decile 1–2 school more likely to have contributed practical help to support the school's activities. In decile 1–2 schools more parents and whānau:

- attended kapa haka (15%, compared with 2% of parents and whānau at decile 9–10 schools)
- helped in the classroom (15%, compared with less than 1%)
- helped in the library (8%, compared with less than 1%)
- coached/helped with kapa haka (5%, compared with less than 1%).

Those with a child at a decile 9–10 school were more likely to have supported the school by contributing their ideas in surveys, fundraising and attending events involving students (with the exception of kapa haka). In decile 9–10 schools, more parents and whānau:

- responded to school surveys (48%, compared with 21% of parents and whānau at decile 1–2 schools)
- took part in fundraising (46%, compared with 28%)
- attended sports (59%, compared with 23%)
- attended school plays/choir/orchestra (35%, compared with 13%).

Looking at differences associated with parents' ethnicities, 21% of Māori whānau attended kapa haka, and 6% coached or helped with kapa haka. Attending sport was most likely among Māori and NZ European/Pākehā parents (around 53% each, compared with 22% of Asian parents). NZ European/Pākehā parents were more likely than those of other ethnicities to take part in fundraising (36%). Pasifika parents had the highest rate of helping in the classroom (15%).

School location was associated with several differences in parent involvement in fundraising, responding to school surveys and attending sports. Parents and whānau whose children were at metropolitan schools were least likely to have taken part in the first two activities, and those whose children attended schools in small cities were the least likely to have attended sports events.

School size was also related to differences here. Those with a child at a small school were the most likely to report involvement in fundraising, and attending or coaching/helping with sports.

## Summary and discussion

Parents and whānau were generally happy with the quality of their child's schooling, and with the role their child's teachers play in supporting the child's learning. For most parents and whānau their child attended their first choice of secondary school and for 60%, this was their nearest school. When parents and whānau chose a school for their youngest child, they were more likely to take into account the child's preference, the school's links with family members and whether their child's friends were also going to that school, than to weigh up information about the school's academic track record or the programmes they offered. For this reason, some of the things they said were of high importance for their child's education did not appear to be given a high level of consideration when choosing their youngest child's school. For example, while factors such as opportunities for learning with digital technology were highly important, a child wanting to go to a school was more compelling for parents and whānau. Similarly, although nearly all parents thought their child gaining a qualification was of high importance, a much smaller proportion indicated they considered the school's academic results when deciding on the child's school.

Many things were important to all parents and whānau for their children's education: getting a qualification, preparing for further study and a career and having opportunities for learning with digital technology. For Māori whānau more than non-Māori, it was important that their child learn te reo Māori at school. A smaller proportion of Māori parents thought their child's school was doing well at helping their child learn te reo Māori.

In the context of a greater focus in schools on tracking students' learning and assessment information, more parents thought they were getting good information from the school about their child's progress (74%, compared with 63% in 2012 and 53% in 2009). As we saw in *Chapter 3: Working with NCEA*, more parents indicated they understand how NCEA works, so are likely to find information about their child's progress of greater relevance.

Parents were using fewer sources than in 2012 to get education-related information. Friends and other parents, as well as newspapers, tended to be their preferred information sources in 2015. There was a decrease in parents' use of ERO as a source of information about their school and about education in general.

Electronic access to information increased with school decile, resulting in unequal use of this information source. School location also made a difference, with parents and whānau with a child at a town school more likely to have met with their child's form teacher, and more likely to get information about the school from a local newspaper.