
15. Trustees' perspectives and the work of school boards

Here we present school trustee perspectives on their role and the work of school boards. We also include principals' views of the key elements in the role of boards, parents' and whānau views of their involvement in consultation and contact with their school board, and principals' views of how their school board is working. Because past analysis has shown that school decile has an association with trustee perspectives and the work of their boards, we report the results of cross-tabulation where there are statistically significant patterns.

Trustee respondents

These perspectives come from 126 trustees, from 95 schools, 68% of whom were board chairs. To reach school trustees for the national survey, we write to the board chair via the school. We send two letters and ask the chair to complete the survey themselves and give the other letter with the survey to another board member other than the principal or teacher representative, preferably one who might have a different view on some issues. In 2019, we provided the option of filling in the survey on paper and mailing it back, or completing it online using a link in the paper survey. Thirty-three trustees filled in the survey online. The margin of error for trustee responses is around 8.7%.

As with the other groups we surveyed, our 2019 response rate was the lowest we have had for the national surveys—18% of the potential respondents, from 27% of the schools in the national survey sample. We had an over-representation of trustees from decile 9–10 schools, and an under-representation of trustees from decile 1–2 schools. The median school roll was 165, somewhat lower than the national median roll of 177.

The majority (80%) identified themselves as New Zealand European / Pākehā (more than the national proportion of primary school trustees, which is 66%);⁵² 12% identified themselves as Māori (less than the national proportion of primary school trustees, which is 18%); 5% identified as Samoan (national proportion is 4%); and 1% each identified as Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, and Indian. Eight percent identified as 'Other' ethnicity. Over one-third (37%) of the trustees who identified as Māori were on the boards of decile 1–2 schools. Trustees who identified as New Zealand European / Pākehā were least likely to be on the boards of decile 1–2 schools (37%).

More female than male trustees responded: 58% female and 41% male, which is close to the national picture for primary school trustees.⁵³

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the trustees who responded to the survey in 2019 had a university-level degree, up from 56% in 2016 and 50% in 2013.⁵⁴ This is much higher than the national proportion of those aged 30–64

⁵² https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/schooling/board_of_trustees

⁵³ No trustees selected the gender diverse option, and just two did not respond to this question.

⁵⁴ Education qualifications of trustees are not reported nationally, so we cannot tell how representative this is of all primary school trustees.

who have a tertiary degree (28.8% in the 2018 Census). Only one trustee who responded to the survey had no qualification. (In the 2018 Census, 13.9% of adults aged 30–64 reported no qualification for their highest qualification.) There was no association between trustees' qualification level and school decile.

Sixty-one percent of the trustees were in paid employment, 29% were self-employed, and 4% were not in paid employment. There was no association between trustees being in paid employment and school decile.

Sixty-eight percent of the trustees who responded in 2019 were board chairs. This is a higher proportion of respondents than in the last two rounds of the survey (61% in 2016 were board chairs, and 48% in 2013). Any marked differences in the views of chairs and other trustees are reported.

Most of the trustees are new to school boards but half have governance experience

Most (86%) of the trustees who responded to the survey had not been on a school board before. This is similar to the proportions in 2016 (81%) and 2013 (86%). Trustees from lower decile schools were more likely to have been on the board of another school (26% of trustees in decile 1–2 schools, compared with 4% of trustees in decile 7–8 schools and 8% of trustees in decile 9–10 schools).

School boards were the first governance experience for around half of the trustees. In 2019, 49% of trustees had no experience on the board of another organisation, similar to 56% in 2016 and 52% in 2013. The remaining 51% indicated that they had served on the board of another type of organisation, with some having served on more than one other board. In 2019, 17% of trustees responding had served on the board of a business, 14% on the board of a non-government/voluntary organisation with staff, 11% on the board of a non-government/voluntary organisation that did not employ staff, 11% on the board of some other organisation, and 8% on the board of an ECE or tertiary organisation.

Almost all the trustees are in paid employment

Almost all the trustees who responded to the survey were also in paid employment: 61% as employees and 30% self-employed. Some board members who were employees got support from their employment for their school trustee role: 43% could use work hours flexibly, 22% could use some work equipment, and 20% could use some paid time for their role. This has not improved since 2013, when 27% of employees could use some work equipment, and 25% some paid time for their role.

Board chairs have more board experience than other trustees

Trustees' median length of time on their board at the time of responding to the survey was 3 years, 5 months. For board chairs the median was 4 years, and for other board members the median was 3 years. As in previous years, there was a significant difference in time on the board between chairs and other trustees: board chairs had been on their board between half a year and just under 3 years longer than other trustees.

Most trustees thought the amount of responsibility the board has is about right

Most of the trustees (84%) thought that the amount of responsibility asked of school boards was about right. The proportion of trustees who thought that the responsibility was about right shows an upwards trend since 2010 (68% in 2010, 77% in 2013, 75% in 2016). A small proportion of trustees (15%) thought too

much was asked of trustees (little change from 2013 and 2016); and just one trustee thought it was too little (in both 2013 and 2016, 2% thought too little was asked of trustees). More chairs than other trustees thought the amount of responsibility asked of school boards was too much—20% of chairs, compared with 5% of other trustees.

Most (84%) of the trustees spent under 6 hours a week on their board work, with 44% spending less than 2 hours a week (as did 47% in 2016, 54% in 2013, and 48% in 2010). In 2013 and 2016 there was an association between being a board chair and time spent on board work, with board chairs spending more time than other trustees. This association was not evident in the 2019 survey data.

Board members are motivated to contribute to their community

Table 23 shows that the main driver for taking on school board responsibility was to contribute to the community (83% of trustees). Around half of the trustees responding went onto a board because they wanted to help their own child, because they were asked to, or because they had particular skills that they felt would be useful. Not many went onto a school board to change things at the school, or because they felt the school lacked leadership. Of the 15 who identified themselves as Māori, four said they were motivated to stand for the board to represent a Māori perspective. Of the eight who identified themselves as Pacific, four said they were motivated to stand for the board to represent a Pacific perspective. A few went on their school board to represent a disability perspective.

Table 23 also shows that most of the drivers or attractions of school board membership have been pretty stable over time, with some decrease in those going onto the board to help their (own) child.

TABLE 23 Trustees' reasons for joining their primary school board

Reason	2010 (n = 252) %	2013 (n = 277) %	2016 (n = 176) %	2019 (n = 126) %
To contribute to the community	86	82	80	83
To help my child/children	66	66	59	54
I was asked	50	44	43	51
I have particular skills that are useful	*	54	48	49
I wanted to learn how the school operated	*	47	38	42
I wanted to improve achievement levels	18	25	18	16
Not many people were standing	*	9	12	13
I wanted to change things at the school	14	11	14	10
Leadership at the school was lacking	9	4	9	5
To represent a Pacific perspective	*	*	5	4
To represent a Māori perspective	*	*	3	3
To represent a disability perspective	*	*	*	2

* Not asked

There was an association between school decile and the trustees who selected “I was asked” as a reason for standing for their school board. The proportion of trustees who reported this was lowest in decile 1–2 and 9–10 schools (37% and 34%), compared with 64% in decile 3–4 schools, 57% in decile 5–6 schools, and 71% in decile 7–8 schools.

Trustees enjoy their role

Two new open questions in the 2019 survey asked trustees what they enjoyed most and least about their role. Almost all the trustees (98%) wrote at least one thing they enjoyed the most about the role. Four themes were the strongest:

- community service, and the opportunity to “give back” and contribute to the local community (commented on by 21% of trustees)
- the opportunity to contribute to improving student outcomes and achieve the best for students (commented on by 21% of trustees)
- enjoying and valuing positive relationships with the school and the community (commented on by 19% of trustees)
- making a difference (commented on by 18% of trustees).

Here are some of their responses:

Being able to contribute something back to the school that my children attend.

Being able to serve the community. I enjoy the relationship with the principal and knowing what makes the school tick.

Discussing elements of a school that really matter. I feel like I can contribute.

Being able to give back to the school community and help with the governance of the school by supporting principal and staff in their management decisions.

The feeling of contributing to the community and school, and learning new skills.

Helping to set the direction of the school and positively impact the wellbeing and achievement of the students at school.

Other aspects trustees enjoyed were getting the opportunity to contribute to setting the school's strategic direction; their own learning; and supporting the principal (all commented on by 13% of trustees).

Most trustees (89%) also wrote at least one thing they enjoyed the least about the role. Two themes emerged most strongly—dealing with information and decisions from the Ministry of Education or ERO (commented on by 20% of trustees), and the time and workload involved in the trustee role (commented on by 18% of trustees):

Dealing with the Ministry! Too much staff turnover. Having to allocate a smaller pot of money. Bureaucracy. Having to fundraise for technology equipment. Having no options for severe behaviour students. Not having our wonderful counsellor recognised by government as being essential for the wellbeing of our students, and therefore having no assistance with funding.

A lot of responsibility and time commitment required for the role.

Too much to do. If we did everything MoE and NZSTA expected of us we would all burn out. The expectations on volunteers are too great.

Other themes of what they enjoyed least about their role came through in 3%–11% of the trustees' comments:

- dealing with complaints and conflict
- the extent of responsibilities
- disciplinary meetings and supporting students who have been excluded
- the lack of parental or community support
- employment and personnel issues
- property issues
- inadequate school funding.

Providing strategic direction is the most important element of the school board role

Providing strategic direction continued to be seen by trustees and principals as the most important element of the role of school boards. Table 24 shows the pattern of responses from trustees and principals was similar, although more trustees than principals selected creating a safe and inclusive environment as the most important element of the board's role.

TABLE 24 Views on the most important element of the board of trustees' role

Most important element	Trustees (n = 126) %	Principals (n = 145) %
Providing strategic direction for school	62	63
Supporting principal	10	8
Creating safe and inclusive environment	9	3
Employing school principal	4	1
Representing parents and whānau in the school	2	4
Scrutinising school performance	2	3
Overseeing principal's performance	1	0
Agent of government/representing government interest	1	2
Overseeing school finances	0	0
Health and safety	0	0

Trustees report that boards spend the most time on student progress and achievement

We asked trustees to rank aspects of board activity by the amount of time spent on them. Their responses showed a wide range between boards in how much time they give to particular aspects of their role (or, in the case of day-to-day management, what they should not be doing as the school's governing body). Apart from financial management and the strategic plan, all the aspects we asked about had at least one trustee saying that was what their board spent *most* of its time on over the past year, and at least one trustee saying that was what their board spent *least* time on.

Fifty-four percent of trustees put student progress and achievement first or second, followed by 27% putting property/maintenance, 25% putting financial management, and 23% putting strategic planning first or second. This is much the same pattern as in 2016.

Table 25 shows the percentage of trustees who ranked each activity first, indicating their board spent the greatest amount of time on it.

TABLE 25 Activities boards spent the most time on

Board activity	Trustees ranking it 1st (n = 126) %
Student progress and achievement	32
Property/maintenance	16
Financial management	10
Review (e.g., policies)	9
Strategic plan	6
Human resources (e.g., performance review and appointment processes)	6
Personnel/industrial (individual cases)	4
Day-to-day management	3
Students behaving inappropriately/discipline/bullying cases	2
Community-related issues	2
Board professional development	2

More attention to student and school performance data in board decision making

We asked principals for their perspective on how their board worked. Figure 62 shows that most of the principals reported that their board actively pays attention to achievement data in making decisions (91%, up from 77% in 2016) and regularly scrutinises school performance (81%, up from 69% in 2016).

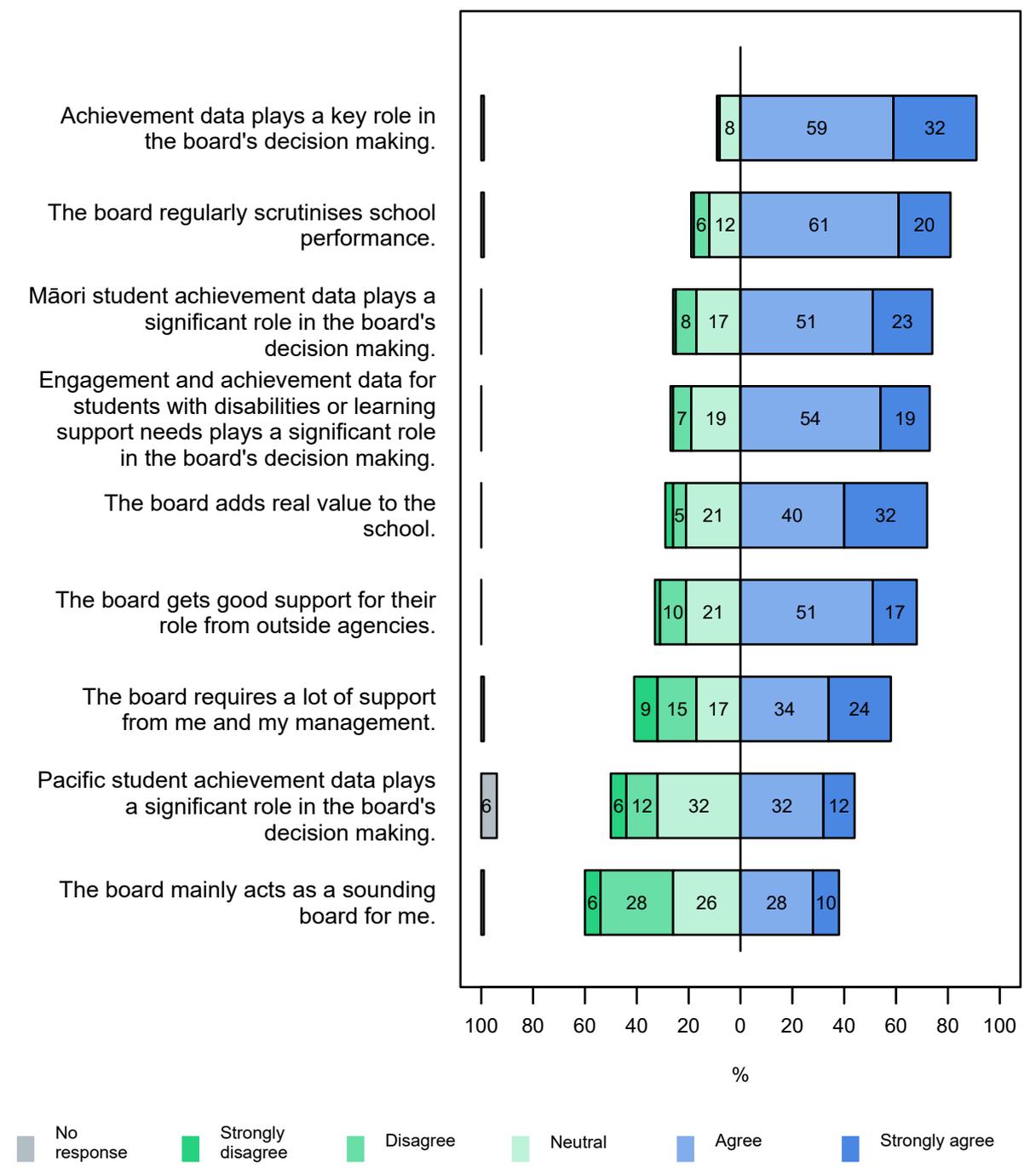
When compared with 2016 survey results, there have also been increases in the proportion of principals who perceive that student data about specific groups of students plays a significant role in board decision making:

- 74% of principals agreed that data about Māori students plays a significant role in board decision making (up from 53% in 2016)
- 44% of principals agreed that data about Pacific students plays a significant role in board decision making (up from 29% in 2016)
- 73% of principals agreed that engagement and achievement data for students with disabilities or learning support needs plays a significant role in board decision making (65% said this in 2016)

There was also an increase in the proportion of principals agreeing that their board requires a lot of support from them and their management (59% up from 36% in 2016). It is possible that this is because of a change in question wording. In 2019 the question asked generally about “your board”; in 2016, the question asked about the “past board”. In both years, the survey was completed around a term after board elections, so when responding to the 2019 survey the principal may have been thinking about their new board, which could require more support.

The principals of decile 1–2 schools were the most likely to *strongly* agree that their board requires a lot of support (54%, compared with 27% for decile 3–4 schools, 18% for decile 5–6 schools, 10% for decile 7–8 schools, and 17% for decile 9–10 schools).

FIGURE 63 Principals' views of their board (n = 145)



Most trustees are positive about how well their school board is doing

Most of the trustees were positive about how well their school board was doing: 30% thought the board was “on top of its task”, and 60% thought it was “making steady progress”. This overall picture has remained much the same since 2010. There was no association by school decile.

Nearly one-third (32%) of trustees said their board regularly reviewed its own processes as recommended (the same as 2016), and 58% said the board did this sometimes (up from 40% in 2013, with 48% saying this in 2016).

Most advice for trustees comes from within their school or from NZSTA

Nearly all trustees responding (98%) had some advice to help them in their role. Trustees were asked about the professional development they had participated in, and the support, advice, and information sources they had used in the past year. The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) is contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide a range of professional development, support, and advisory services to boards of trustees. All state and state-integrated school boards can access basic NZSTA services, resources, and information. School boards can also choose to become member schools through an annual subscription, which offers benefits including national and regional newsletters and meetings, an annual conference, additional web resources, study awards, advocacy, and discounts on insurances and copyright licensing. Around 92% of state and state-integrated school boards are members of NZSTA.⁵⁵

Table 26 shows that most of the trustees got advice from their principal and other school staff (77%) and their own colleagues on the school board (62%). Sixty-two percent had taken part in NZSTA workshops, 43% had sought advice from the NZSTA Advisory and Support Centre, and a smaller proportion had used other NZSTA services. We do not include comparisons with 2016 or previous years here, because in previous years we asked about advice and support in more detail.

TABLE 26 Advice sources trustees have used for the role in the past 12 months (*n* = 126)

Advice source	Trustees (<i>n</i> = 126) %
Guidance and information from principal/school staff	77
Guidance and information from other trustees on the school board	62
Took part in NZSTA workshops	62
Advice from NZSTA Advisory and Support Centre	43
Contact with trustees in other schools	37
Professional development in their paid work	25
NZSTA online modules	25
Advice from ERO	21
Advice from NZSTA regional advisor on governance issues	19
Advice from regional MoE office	18
Advice from NZSTA regional advisor on employment issues	13
Attended NZSTA conference	10
Other	10

There was an association between school decile and the proportion of trustees who took part in NZSTA online modules. This was highest for trustees in decile 5–6 schools (48%), followed by trustees in decile 1–2 schools (32%) and in decile 3–4 schools (28%). It was lowest for trustees in higher decile schools (17% of trustees in decile 7–8 schools, and 11% of trustees in decile 9–10 schools).

55 <https://www.nzsta.org.nz/our-organisation/> (5 May 2020)

There was also an association between school decile and the proportion of trustees who had received advice from ERO. This was highest for trustees in decile 1–2 schools (47%), and lowest for trustees in decile 9–10 schools (8%).

Trustees in decile 9–10 schools were most likely to say they had professional development in their paid work that helped with their governance role (47%) compared with 9–26% for trustees in other decile schools.

Over two-thirds of trustees would like more funding for their school

Almost all trustees felt there was something about their role that they would change. Only 6% (eight trustees) sought no change.

More funding for their school topped the list of changes trustees would like, by a considerable margin (70% of trustees, up from 53% in 2016 and 49% in 2013). Table 27 also shows that, compared with 2016, there was an increase in the proportion of trustees who would like Ministry expectations to be reduced, more support from parents and whānau, and more guidance on how to use achievement data. There was a decrease in the proportion of trustees who selected a clearer distinction between governance and management as an area they would change about their role (10% compared with 21% in 2016).

TABLE 27 Main changes trustees would make in their role

Change	2010 (n = 252) %	2013 (n = 277) %	2016 (n = 176) %	2019 (n = 126) %
More funding for the school	66	49	53	70
Improve my knowledge or training	38	43	46	42
Reduce Ministry expectations of what we can provide for the funding we get	23	26	22	36
More support from parents and whānau	31	21	18	34
More guidance on how to use achievement data to inform board decision making	30	26	15	32
More support for community consultation	*	*	*	27
Work more with other schools	31	28	22	21
Higher payment (meeting fees and expenses)	12	*	18	20
More time to focus on strategic issues	20	20	19	19
More support/advice from Ministry of Education	13	14	19	19
More advice about modern learning environments	*	*	24	18
More support/advice from independent education experts	22	17	13	16
More support in our employer role	*	*	*	14
More support to meet community expectations	*	*	*	14
Clearer distinction between governance and management	26	18	21	10
Reduce workload/paperwork	14	11	10	10
More support/advice from NZSTA	5	7	3	7
Better information from school staff to inform our decisions	7	11	7	5
Clearer guidelines to make disciplinary decisions	2	7	6	5
Better communication between board members	6	8	9	4
Reduce role in disciplinary decisions	2	3	3	2

* Not asked in that year. There were questions about community consultation in previous years, but the wording has changed too much to allow a meaningful comparison.

Trustees at decile 1–6 schools were the most interested in having more support for community consultation (48% at decile 5–6 schools, 36% at decile 3–4 schools, 32% at decile 1–2 schools, 16% at decile 9–10 schools, 13% at decile 7–8 schools).

Many boards have no issues raised by parents

More than half the trustees in 2019 had not had parents raise issues with their board. In 2019, 41% of the trustees said that parents had raised issues with their board that year, as did 48% in 2016 and 51% in 2013.

The issues raised were wide ranging. Table 28 shows that student behaviour or bullying and dissatisfaction with a staff member continue to be the most reported issues that parents and whānau raise with school boards. Other issues were all selected by 10 or fewer trustees as issues that parents and whānau had raised in the past year. Of note is that funding, fundraising, and spending was raised less than in previous

years (3% of trustees said parents had raised this with the board, compared with 10% in 2016). No trustees reported that parents and whānau had asked about provision for Māori students, Pacific students, or students with English as a second language.

In 2019 we asked about four new issues and all had been raised with at least one school board: students' mental health and wellbeing (4% of trustees), religion in schools (3% of trustees), environmental issues (2% of trustees), and sexuality/relationship education curriculum (1% of trustees).

TABLE 28 Main issues raised by parents with their school board

Issue (n = all trustees responding to the survey)	2013 (n = 277) %	2016 (n = 176) %	2019 (n=126) %
Students behaving inappropriately or bullying	16	18	19
Dissatisfaction with a staff member	13	16	12
Transport	9	6	8
Class sizes	6	5	5
Cost for parents and whanau	5	5	5
Students' mental health and wellbeing	*	*	4
School uniform	*	7	4
Inclusion of students in sports/cultural events	?	2	4
Grounds/maintenance	16	6	4
School zone/enrolment scheme	13	4	4
Religion in schools	*	*	3
Funding, including fundraising/spending	12	10	3
Environmental issues	*	*	2
Provision of learning support	7	6	2
Student achievement	5	5	2
Modern/innovative learning environments	*	4	2
Curriculum	5	2	2
Homework	5	2	2
Digital technology/e-learning	5	3	1
Theft/vandalism	3	2	1
Sexuality/relationship education curriculum	2	*	1
Provision for Māori students	4	3	0
Provision for Pacific students	0	0	0
Provision for students with English as a second language	0	1	0
Co-curricular provision	*	1	0

* Not asked in that year

More boards use email surveys to consult with their community

Boards have a legal requirement to regularly consult with their school community. Most of the trustees (87%) said their board had consulted with their community in the past 12 months. This is a similar proportion to previous years.

A notable change from previous cycles of the survey was the increase in the proportion of trustees reporting that their board surveys parents and whānau by email (57% up from 32% in 2016). More boards now use an email survey than a paper questionnaire. The second most used method was a public meeting or workshop at the school (see Table 29). Most (85%) of the trustees whose boards had consulted with their parents and whānau thought that the methods used were successful—53% generally successful, and 32% for some issues. This is a similar picture to previous surveys.

In 2016 we reported that trustees from decile 1–2 schools were least likely to report emailing surveys to parents and whānau, but this association was not evident in the 2019 data. Trustees from decile 1–2 schools were, however, more likely than other trustees to report that they consulted with the community through questions in the school newsletter (73% compared with 55% of trustees in decile 3–4 schools, 32% of trustees in decile 5–6 schools, 43% of trustees in decile 7–8 schools, and 26% of trustees in decile 9–10 schools).

TABLE 29 Board interaction and consultation with community

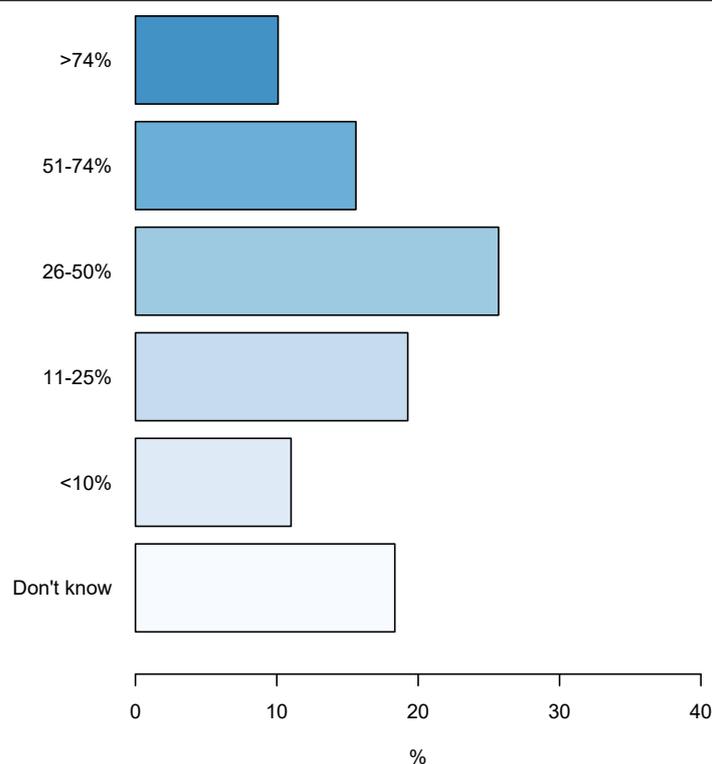
Methods used to consult <i>n</i> = number of trustees who answered yes to the question "Does your board consult with its community?"	2010 (<i>n</i> = 208) %	2013 (<i>n</i> = 226) %	2016 (<i>n</i> = 152) %	2019 (<i>n</i> = 110) %
Email survey of parents and whānau	6	25	32	57
Public meetings/workshops at school	42	50	52	49
Paper questionnaire to parents and whānau	59	73	63	46
Questions in school newsletter	50	43	40	42
Parents and whānau invited to board meetings/workshops	32	31	38	28
Hui with whānau Māori	15	26	18	20
Public meetings/workshops in community	11	11	11	16
Fono with Pacific families	*	*	*	11
Hui with iwi/hapū	*	*	12	9
Specific groups met with board members	12	10	7	6
Phone survey(s) of parents and whānau	5	8	6	3
Home meetings	3	4	2	1

Trustees on boards that consulted their community indicated a wide range of topics covered (see Table 30). Compared with 2016, fewer trustees reported that their board consulted on the use of digital technology, and modern/innovative learning environments. This likely reflects that these have been embedded more in schools since 2016. It is also notable that fewer trustees reported that their board consulted on student achievement, or on provision for Māori students. Decile 1–2 school trustees were more likely than other trustees to report consulting about student achievement (47%), school trips (47%), sports (33%), student attendance (27%), and timetabling / start and finish times (20%). Decile 3–4 school trustees were more likely than other trustees to report consulting about incorporating te reo Māori and tikanga Māori (25%), and on the school role in relation to climate change (15%).

TABLE 30 School community consultation topics, reported by trustees (n = 110)

2019 (n = 110) % range	Topic
30%–36%	School strategic plan Curriculum Reporting to parents and whānau
25%–29%	School culture Ways of working with parents, whānau, and community
15%–19%	School trips Student achievement (18%, down from 38% in 2016) Use of digital technology (16%, down from 24% in 2016) School uniform Student physical health
10%–14%	Property Religious instruction Sports Sexuality and relationship education (12%, up from 6% in 2016) Students' mental health or wellbeing (12%, new in 2019) Enrolment scheme / zoning Incorporating te reo and tikanga Funding
5%–9%	Provision for Pacific students Provision for Māori students (9%, down from 20% in 2016) Co-curricular activities Modern/innovative learning environments (7%, down from 20% in 2016) Students behaving inappropriately or bullying Provision of learning support Student attendance Timetabling/start and finish times Local hapū and iwi education priorities
Less than 5%	School role in relation to climate change Provision for students with English as a second language Bilingual Pacific education

Figure 64 shows a wide range in the proportion of parents and whanau who trustees estimated took part in their board's consultation in 2019.

FIGURE 64 Proportion of parents and whānau taking part in school board consultations (Trustees, $n = 126$)

Around half the parents and whānau responding were happy with consultation, contact with board, and information about the school

Over half (59%) of those responding to the parent and whānau survey thought their school genuinely consulted with them about new directions or issues. Around a quarter (23%) of the respondents said they were unsure, and 16% thought their school did not genuinely consult with them about these things. These proportions are similar to 2016.

Over half (52%) of parents and whānau felt they had enough contact with their school's trustees, with 23% unsure. This is more positive than reported in 2016, when 41% of parents and whānau felt they had enough contact with their school board.

Parents and whānau who answered 'no' or 'not sure' were asked what sort of contact with the board they would like more of.

- 35% wanted easier access to records of board meetings
- 28% wanted more surveys or consultation from the board
- 22% wanted more frequent meetings for parents to have discussions with the board
- 14% wanted greater responsiveness from the board to feedback or complaints
- 10% wanted more time for public discussion at board meetings
- 9% wanted easier access to board meetings
- 4% wanted more involvement in the board's student discipline hearings.

We also asked parents and whānau if there was any information they would like to have about the school that they don't already have. Half (52%) said no, a quarter (25%) said yes, and 22% were not sure.

Parents were asked what other information, if any, they would have liked about the school. The areas of information selected by 5% or more of parents are shown in Table 31. Much of this is information that would normally be provided by the school.

TABLE 31 Information parents and whānau would like about the school that they don't already have

Information	Parents and whānau (n = 395) %
What is taught (the curriculum)	11
Availability of extra support for learning	9
School policies	8
How the school supports safety and students' wellbeing	6
What to expect and how things are supposed to work	6
Student achievement across the school	6
School progress on its annual goals	6
School's use of funds	5
Te reo Māori learning options at the school	5
How I can support the school	5
How to communicate with the school and provide feedback	5

There were two differences associated with school decile:

- Parents and whānau with a child at a decile 5–6 school were most likely to say they wanted more information about the availability of extra support for learning (67%, compared with 8% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 1–2 school, and 27–33% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 3–4, or 7–10 school).
- Parents and whānau with a child at a decile 9–10 school were most likely to say they wanted more information about what to expect and how things are supposed to work (42%, compared with 31% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 7–8 schools, 15% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 1–2 school, and under 10% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 3–6 school).

Twenty-one percent of the parents and whānau said there was an area of school life where they would like to have a say and felt they could not, and a further 13% were unsure. This is much the same as in 2016. The proportion of parents and whānau who said there was an area of school life where they would like a say increased from 13% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 1–2 school, to 32% of parents and whānau with a child at a decile 9–10 school.

Nine percent of parents and whānau would like more say in how children learn, and 7% would like more say in what they learn. How student wellbeing is supported, which class their child is in, student behaviour, and homework were all identified by 6%. Other areas were identified by 3% or fewer: how students' cultural identity is supported, funding decisions, school uniform or dress, and the school timetable.

Summary

The 2019 survey responses show that most aspects of trustees' work and their perspective of their board's role have remained much the same over the past decade. Primary school boards of trustees draw on parents and others who are motivated to contribute to their community. As a group they are more highly educated than the national average and most are in paid employment. The drivers or attractions of school board membership have been pretty stable over time. Trustees most enjoy the opportunity to "give back" and to contribute to student outcomes in their broadest sense.

Most of the trustees who responded to the survey had not been on a school board before, although around half had experience on the board of another organisation. Most spent under 6 hours a week on their board work, with 44% spending less than 2 hours a week. A sizeable minority could use or give themselves some support from their employment for their trustee role, most commonly by working flexibly.

Many primary school trustees thought that the amount of responsibility asked of school boards was about right. However, more chairs than other trustees thought the amount of responsibility asked of school boards was too much: 20% of chairs, compared with 5% of other trustees.

Board capability and focus showed some variation. Most trustees were positive about how well their school board was doing, and many principals saw their school board as adding real value to the school. However, over half of the principals considered their board needed a lot of support from school staff.

Nearly all trustees responding had some advice or support to help them in their role. Trustees were supported in a variety of ways, both from within the school by staff and other trustees, and from external organisations, particularly NZSTA, and to a lesser extent the Ministry of Education and ERO.

Student progress and achievement, followed by property/maintenance, financial management, and strategic planning were the main focus for boards.

There was an increasing use of digital technology in how boards consulted with parents. Only 41% of trustees said parents had raised issues with their board, with 19% of trustees reporting student behaviour or bullying and 12% dissatisfaction with a staff member.

Trustees' main calls for change to their role continued to identify more school funding and improvements to their knowledge or training. More would now like Ministry expectations to be reduced, more support from parents and whānau, and more guidance on how to use achievement data. While the changes trustees would like include some things trustees can do individually or as a board, such as improving their own knowledge, many are outside their control and require involvement from agencies beyond the board or school.