

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update



Teaching and Learning

In this issue:

02 What does effective engagement look like?

03 What supports effective engagement?

04 Creating powerful learning partnerships

Welcome to *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*

Curriculum Updates support school leaders and teachers as they work to design and review their school curriculum, in line with the New Zealand Curriculum and with current knowledge and understandings about effective classroom teaching.

Curriculum Updates are published in the *Education Gazette* and are available online at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

This Update focuses on partnerships between schools and diverse families and communities. It builds on Update 1 (September 2010), which focused on engaging with whānau and Māori communities.



Engaging with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds

This Update is designed to help teachers and school leaders to work more effectively with their schools' families and communities to improve students' motivation, progress, and achievement.

Effective collaboration between home and school can lift children's achievement significantly (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). This is why *The New Zealand Curriculum* identifies community engagement as a key principle that must underpin all curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation:

"The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whānau, and communities."

The New Zealand Curriculum, page 9

Effective communication and reporting in relation to the New Zealand Curriculum and the National Standards contribute to

home-school partnerships by enabling parents to better understand their children's progress and the ways in which they can help their learning at home.

"Burmese refugee parents want to know how their children are learning and achieving and what they need to do to help their child ...

Some Burmese refugee parents want to be involved in school activities, such as camps, day trips, and helping in the library."

Refugee parent
(Education Review Office, 2008)

"It is like a bird needing two strong wings to fly."

Pasifika parent
on home-school partnerships
(Education Review Office, 2008)

What does effective engagement look like?

Effective home–school engagement is based on equal partnerships that respect and draw upon the expertise of both parties.

In such partnerships, teachers learn about students’ backgrounds and welcome the contribution families can make to teaching and learning; and parents learn about the kinds of education students require for the future and what this means for teaching and learning.

Cultural factors that pose challenges for engagement include schools’ preconceptions

and parents’ uncertainties and lack of fluency in English (Gorinski and Fraser, 2006).

Cultural mismatch can occur when a family’s beliefs differ from those of the dominant culture (Gorinski and Fraser, 2006). If teachers do not understand such differences in beliefs and expectations, school practices can be a barrier to effective engagement with parents and to effective learning for students.

What does research say about effective engagement?

The *School Leadership and Student Outcomes BES* (Robinson et al., 2009, chapter 7) found that the most effective home–school partnerships are those in which:

- parents and teachers are involved together in children’s learning
- teachers make connections to students’ lives
- family and community knowledge is incorporated into the curriculum and teaching practices.

The *Family and Community Engagement BES* (Biddulph, Biddulph, and Biddulph, 2003) found that the most effective partnerships:

- treat families with dignity and respect and add to family practices, experiences, values, and competencies (rather than undermining them)
- build on the strong aspirations and motivation that most parents have for their children’s development
- offer structured and specific suggestions rather than general advice
- provide group opportunities as well as opportunities for one-to-one contact (especially informal contact)
- empower those involved by fostering autonomy and self-reliance within families, schools, and communities.

“School–home partnerships are critically dependent upon the agency of educators, their ability to avoid deficit or stereotypical characterisations of parents and caregivers, and their ability to initiate links, respond to, and recognise strengths within the diverse families of their students. Partnerships that align school and home practices and enable parents to actively support their children’s in-school learning have shown some of the strongest impacts on student outcomes ...”

Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling BES, page 44
(Alton-Lee, 2003)



> CASE STUDY

Families sharing their expertise

At Glenfield Primary School, most English language learners are from the Philippines. When Filipino students put on a cultural display in the school library, Susan Snowball, the school’s Diversity Pilot Project co-ordinator, found that they were proud to show off their culture, but they were far less confident in their own language abilities in Tagalog.

This provided an opportunity to do something that would value and develop the students’ own language and culture. One of the children’s grandmothers was involved in the cultural display, and her willingness to help with the students’ Tagalog language skills sparked the idea to run a speech competition. The speech competition was also an opportunity to involve the children’s parents, who had much to offer with the preparations and judging.

With the families and the school working together, the eleven children were well prepared and participated with much enjoyment. The speech competition also supported learning in the wider school curriculum because the students also had to deliver their English speeches that term.

The competition was so beneficial that Susan plans to invite two nearby schools to join in the event this year.

“It was great to see that, due to the involvement of the community in this project, the grandmother who was so involved with the cultural and speech events decided to stand for the board of trustees and was elected.”

Susan Snowball

Guiding questions He pātai

- How can we work together with diverse families to enhance student outcomes?
- How could we draw on the resources in our parent community to support our teaching and learning?
- What opportunities does our current planning provide for including the knowledge and expertise of our diverse school community?

What supports effective engagement?

What have parents found useful?

The biggest concerns for refugee, migrant, and Pasifika parents are about effective communication with schools. Parents expect teachers to be proactive in developing relationships with them and in learning about their cultural backgrounds. Refugee, migrant, and Pasifika parents want to be valued for the contribution they can make to children's learning and the school.

One of the goals of the Pasifika Education Plan 2009–2012 is to "increase effective engagement between Pasifika parents, families and teachers and schools focused on learning." In three different studies (Gorinski, 2005; Gorinski and Fraser, 2006; and Taylor, 2008), Pasifika parents identified a range of initiatives that helped them to engage with schools. These included:

- a variety of communication methods, such as face-to-face communication, newsletters translated into their first language, telephone contact, and home-school communication notebooks
- more frequent contact about their children's progress, especially when the school is celebrating their achievements
- meetings with other parents to discuss common interests, issues, and ways to help their children with learning
- formal home-school partnerships, especially those focused on literacy and numeracy and those that acknowledge and respect their children's culture
- a homework centre at their child's school, which helps to build parents' own confidence in helping their child to learn
- information meetings, for example, about the National Certificate of Educational Achievement
- access to interpreters or community liaison people
- having a staff member as a key contact or liaison person for Pasifika families and a senior manager responsible for Pasifika students.

The Diversity Pilot Project

Six schools (two primary, two intermediate, and two secondary) with diverse student populations participated in the Diversity Pilot Project, which is designed to help them to work more effectively with diverse families and communities. The project has provided insights into what all schools can do to improve their engagement with diverse families and communities.

The first step for each school was appointing a diversity co-ordinator. The co-ordinator guided each school through an extensive cultural audit, which covered:

- the school's vision
- its staff
- its students and families
- its curriculum, teaching, and learning
- school events and practices.

The audit identified current effective practices, as well as areas for further development, for engaging with diverse students and families.

> CASE STUDY

Papatoetoe High School

Papatoetoe High School was involved in the Diversity Pilot Project. It is a decile 3 school with around 1780 students, comprising Asian and Pasifika students (50 and 21 percent respectively), Māori students (14 percent), Pākehā students (12 percent), and students from other ethnic backgrounds (3 percent).

In 2010, the school ran a parents' forum, in which parents from the main ethnic groups in their school were represented. All staff members participated in the discussions.

Four questions were sent out in advance:

1. What are the important cultural and religious celebrations for your culture [or ethnicity] that could impact on your child at school?
2. What responsibilities are expected of your children in the family, the home, and outside of school?
3. What do you expect for the future of your children – for example, jobs, marriage, continuing education, etc?

4. What are your and your community's expectations of teachers and of the school?

In the week following the forum, the staff split into groups to reflect on the forum discussions and consider ways in which individual teachers and the school as a whole might change their approach and connect better with the community.

"The forum was extremely successful. Staff gained invaluable information about the cultural, religious, and general expectations and responsibilities placed on their students, as seen from the parents' perspectives. The participating parents enjoyed the opportunity to share their culture with the staff."

Teacher's comment, Diversity Pilot Project

Pasifika School Community Parent Liaison Project

The Pasifika School Community Parent Liaison (PSCPL) project focuses on raising Pasifika student achievement by supporting clusters of schools to develop effective engagement practices with Pasifika parents and communities. PSCPL also utilises and enhances evidence-based best practice in teaching and learning.

PSCPL involves clusters of schools working together with a Pasifika Liaison Advisor (PLA). The PLA supports the schools to facilitate

engagement activities focused on learning and strengthens the relationship between schools and parents. Some of these activities include parent sessions, homework centres, and professional development for teachers on effective engagement and teaching with Pasifika students. Participation in PSCPL increased awareness of many principals and senior managers about the importance of fostering positive relationships between teachers and Pasifika students.

There are currently five PSCPL clusters in the Auckland area. For more information on PSCPL and to see it in action, visit www.pasifika.tki.org.nz

Creating powerful learning partnerships

Home-school partnerships that are tailored to the unique needs of a particular school and community are more successful than those using a standard approach (Brooking and Roberts, 2007). However, some ways of working with families and communities are effective across a wide range of contexts.

Identifying actions

Research in schools (for example, Bull, Brooking, and Campbell, 2008; Taylor, 2008) suggests that partnerships work best when actions are:

- the result of shared reflection on current practice
- planned for and embedded within whole-school development plans
- goal-oriented and focused on learning
- evaluated and reflected upon by both partners as part of ongoing improvement.

Providing support from leaders

The evidence is clear that effective partnerships require:

- strong leadership
- a shared vision
- whole-school commitment.

Establishing relationships

Evidence (such as from Gorinski, 2006; Taylor, 2008; Bull, Brooking, and Campbell, 2008) shows that successful partnerships:

- have collaborative and mutually respectful relationships
- are responsive to different community characteristics
- adapt, rather than adopt, new ideas
- involve two-way engagement in which each partner learns from, and teaches, the other.

Helpful resources

> Home-School Partnerships

www.home-schoolpartnerships.tki.org.nz/ (until early July 2011)
<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/community-engagement> (from July 2011)

This site provides information, guidance, and resources to support schools in developing and building on their home-school partnerships.

> The Pasifika Education Plan 2009–2012

www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PasifikaEducationPlan.aspx

This plan aims to increase educational achievement for Pasifika students. It encourages schools to engage with their Pasifika communities, for example, by participating in initiatives such as the Pasifika School Community Parent Liaison Project.

> Te Kete Ipurangi: Pasifika Education Community

www.pasifika.tki.org.nz/Resources/Engaging-with-Pasifika-parents

Resources for engaging with Pasifika parents, families, and communities

> ESOL Online

www.esolonline.tki.org.nz

This site aims to help primary and secondary teachers respond to the needs of their English language learners. It includes a section on parents and families.

> LEAP (Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika students)

<http://leap.tki.org.nz/>

The LEAP resource brings together evidence about what can support bilingual Pasifika students' learning.

> Interventions for Refugee Children in New Zealand Schools: Models, Methods, and Best Practice

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/5463

This review looks at the literature on issues facing refugee and migrant families and ways to support refugee children in New Zealand schools.

References and additional bibliographic resources

For a full list of references, see the online version of this Curriculum Update, available at: http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

> CASE STUDY

Overcoming language barriers: ESOL portfolios

Glendowie Primary School is a decile 9 school with fifty-five language learners among its 650 students. It has begun to use ESOL portfolios with year 7 and 8 students as a way of supporting students' learning and more effective communication with their parents.

The portfolios document students' overall progress, their significant achievements, their own reflections on their work, and teacher assessments.

"I really want to share my ESOL portfolios with my family, especially my father. All other family opposed about to go New Zealand, so I want make them feel a bit sorry to my father, by showing my improvement by the portfolios. And my father will proud himself and will proud of me. I really want to see my father's smile."

Student

Guiding questions He pātai

- How can we support diverse parents and families to feel confident about engaging with us?
- Do we know what works well in meeting the requirements of our diverse learners and families and where improvements are needed?
- How can we plan purposeful conversations with families from diverse backgrounds that will improve teaching and learning?
- How can we evaluate the impact of such conversations on student achievement?

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