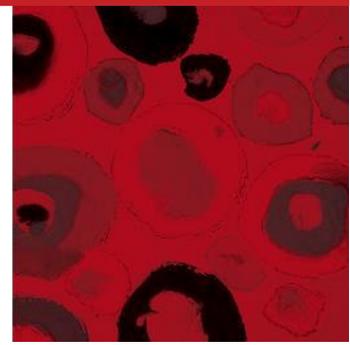


# What kids say about education and achievement



In term 4, 2016, we received perspectives and feedback about schooling and the education system from 554 primary and secondary school students aged 8 to 18 from nine schools .

The responses were collected via an online survey delivered by schools engaged with The Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s ‘Child and Youth Voices’ project. The students who responded to our survey identified with a wide range of ethnicities:

- 61% identified as NZ European
- 22% identified as Asian
- 21% identified as Maori
- 12.5% identified as Pacific Island
- 4% identified as Middle Eastern or Latin descent
- 8% identified as ‘other’.

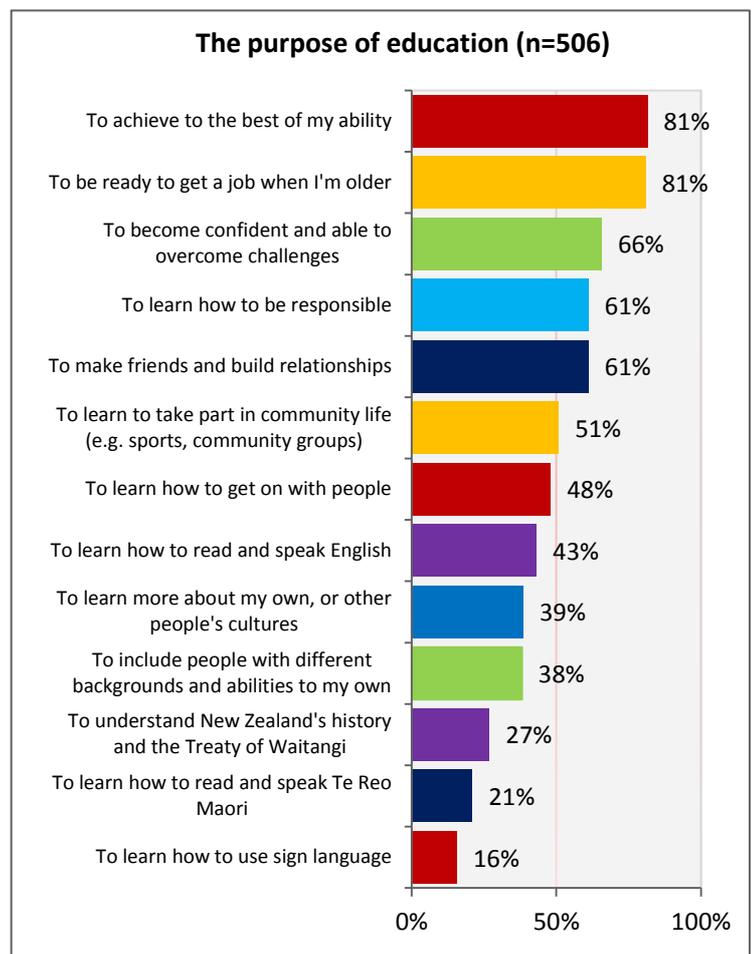
Significantly more boys than girls completed this survey (77% male respondents). This was due to one boys’ college being particularly proactive in supporting their students to complete the survey. The survey was offered to 32 schools from throughout New Zealand, and the voluntary nature means we are limited in how we control which schools participate in which surveys. .

Students had the option to skip any question that they did not wish to answer, so not every student answered every question in the survey. Further, students were able to select more than one response on a number of the questions, so the total percentages in some questions add up to more than 100%.

The perspectives gained in this survey will be used to inform the Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s submission on the update of the *Education Act 1989*.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION?

506 students answered this question.



We provided students with a number of purpose statements, derived from the Education Act Review document, and asked them to select all the responses they felt applied to the question “what is the purpose of education”. The most common responses were “To achieve to the best of my ability” and “To be ready to get a job when I’m older” (both 81%).

The full responses to the survey question are shown in the above graph.

Some quotes from students about their perspective of the purpose of education included:

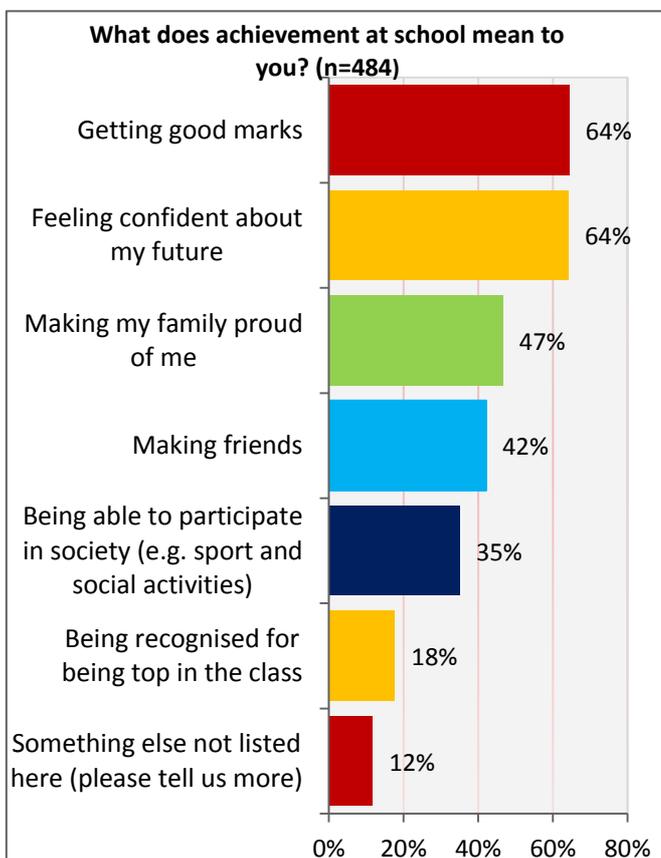
- *"Life lessons", Maths, Work Ethic, How to be an adult e.g paying bills tax returns etc"* (15 year old student)
- *"To learn how the world works. In a geo-political sense."* (15 year old student)
- *"To help New Zealand be better"* (10 year old student)
- *"Learn how to be a well rounded citizen of the modern world"* (17 year old students)

We also asked students their perspectives on the single most important reason for education. Again, the two most common responses were, *"To be ready to get a job when I'm older"* (39%) and *"To achieve to the best of my ability"* (35%).

The third most common response (at 10% of all respondents) was *"To become confident and overcome challenges"*

## WHAT DOES ACHIEVEMENT MEAN TO STUDENTS?

484 students answered this question



We asked students to choose from a list of responses for this question. Many of the options for this question were based on responses students gave in previous engagements on the same topic, when the questions were open-ended and they could give their own response.

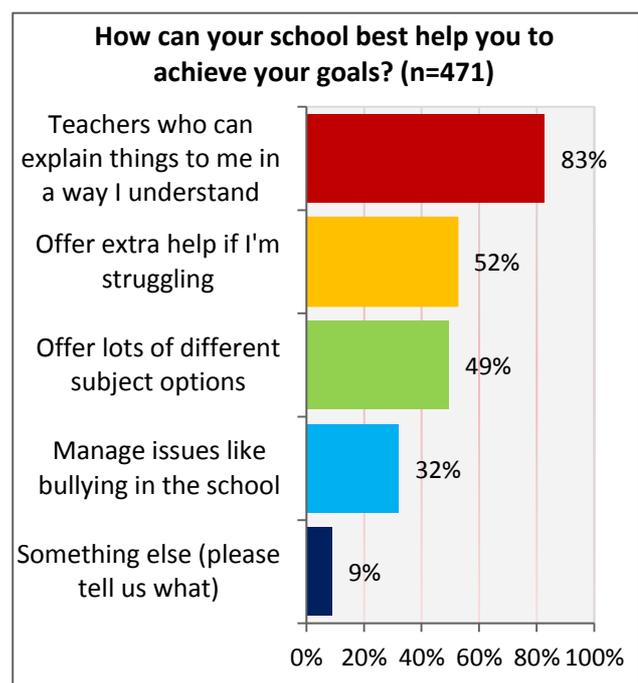
*"Getting good marks"* and *"Feeling confident about my future"* were the two equal highest responses, each selected by 64% of respondents.

Students were able to respond by selecting the option 'something else not listed here' and give their own perspectives of what achievement at school meant to them. Some of the responses to this were:

- *"Gaining knowledge about myself, others, and the world around me"* (13 year old student)
- *"Knowing that you are more than capable to achieve the highest of your abilities."*(15 year old student)
- *"Working to the best of my ability and also being confident about if my life is going the right way"* (14 year old student)
- *"Learn how to work"* (13 year old student)
- *"Do well in sports"* (14 year old student)

## HOW CAN SCHOOLS SUPPORT STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS?

471 students answered this question



The majority of students who answered the question thought that having teachers who can explain things to them in a way that they can understand was the most important way that schools could help them achieve their goals (83% of respondents).

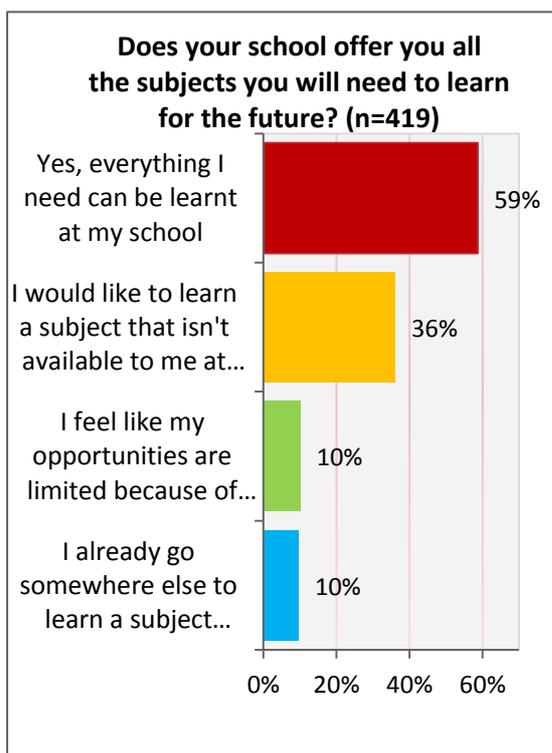
Some comments from students about this topic included:

- *"Teachers who guide and teach how to learn rather than teach material, keeping high achieving kids motivated to keep learning."* (15 year old student)
- *"It sounds bad but not having a uniform because for me I feel like I work far better when I'm comfortable and in my own clothes"* (14 year old student)
- *"Have smaller class sizes"*(15 year old student)
  - *"Create a good school environment"*(13 year old student)

## OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOL

419 students answered this question

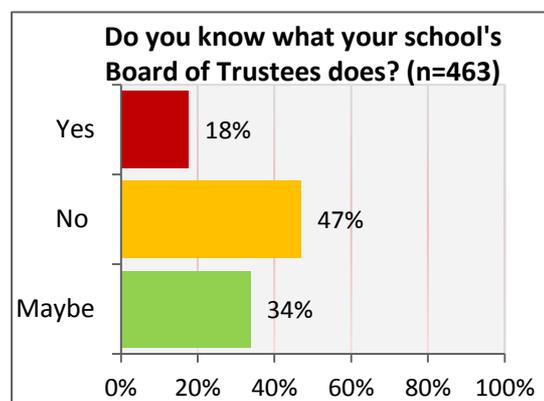
We asked students how confident they were that the school could offer them subjects to meet their needs for the future. The majority (59%) who answered this question believed that the school offered them all the subjects that they needed for the future.



- *"I am interested in things like coding and computers and right now I have options which I have to choose that I don't really want to learn about"* (14 year old student)
- *"There's no psychology subject offered for NCEA, my sister can do this for the IB programme"* (15 year old student)
- *"I think that language opportunities are limited. I also think that more emphasis should be put on more important subjects (maths, english, science etc.)"* (14 year old student)
- *"I think that schools should make more 'life courses' classes like managing money or parenting"* (14 year old student)
- *"I would like to take both physics and chemistry next year (instead of choosing one) but i'm fine with waiting until level 2 to be able to take both"* (14 year old student)
- *"Maybe not EVERYTHING, but the range of subjects is superb"* (14 year old student)
- *"My school offers me everything I need at this point in time, but classes I want to take aren't available as I'm only a year 9"* (13 year old student)

## STUDENT UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNANCE OF THE SCHOOL

We asked students if they knew what their school's board of trustees does. Less than half of the 463 respondents answered yes to this question (47%).

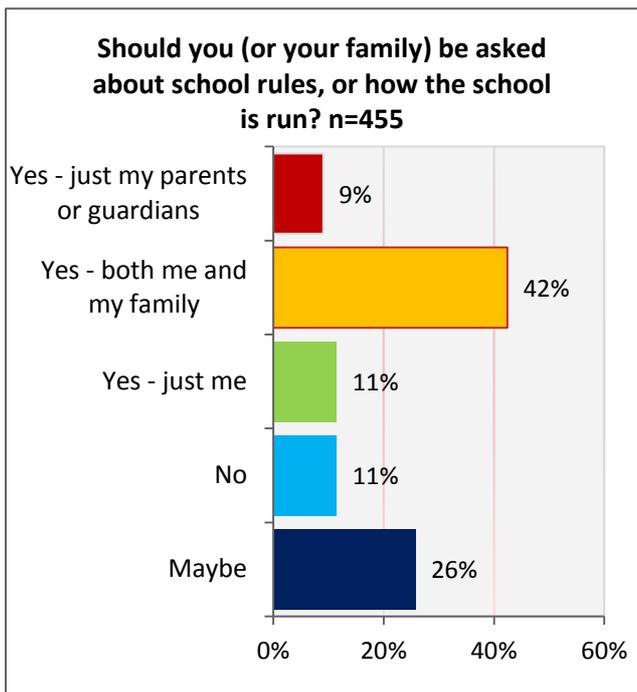


We invited students to tell us more about what they thought the role of the Board of Trustees was. Some of their responses were as follows:

- "They try to make school better (but to be honest all their ideas never work)"(11 year old student)
- "They make decisions about the school"(14 year old student)
- "Organise things and control the principal"(11 year old student)
- "Decides what to fund, manages the business side of the school, stops the school being sued: (15 year old student)
- "A bunch of old guys that have never taught in a class making decisions for kids they have never met".(15 year old student)
- "Sort out the money and what they should do to make it a better school"(12 year old student)

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL DECISIONS

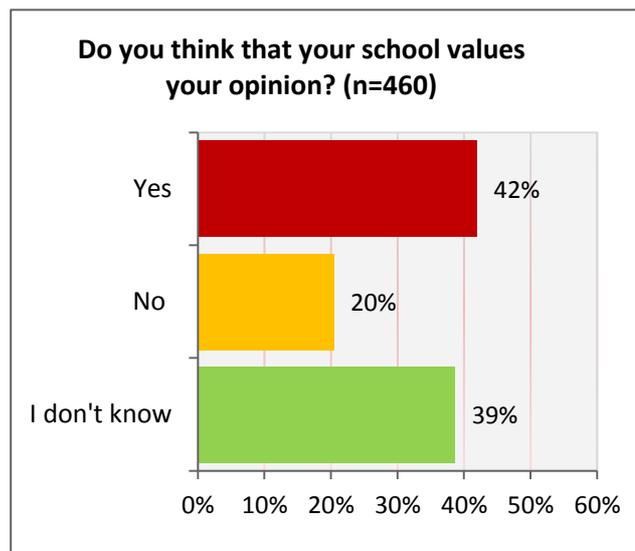
The students we surveyed had clear expectations that they and their whanau should be consulted on decisions affecting them or the school. The majority of the 455 students who answered this question expected either them and/or their whanau to be consulted, as can be seen in the graph below. Only 11% responded 'no' to the question.



Students were invited to tell us more about what they thought on the topic. Some of the comments included:

- "This helps the parents be more engaged in our school life and they then can help us get better" (10 year old student)
- "I think the rules should be reviewed by parents and students at the end of each year" (17 year old student)
- "So that me and my family both know what to do and so that we can be safe" (10 year old student)

We also asked students if they felt that the school valued their opinion. Of the 460 students who answered this question, less than half of the students answered that they felt their school valued their opinion, with the remainder selecting either 'no' or 'I don't know' as responses.

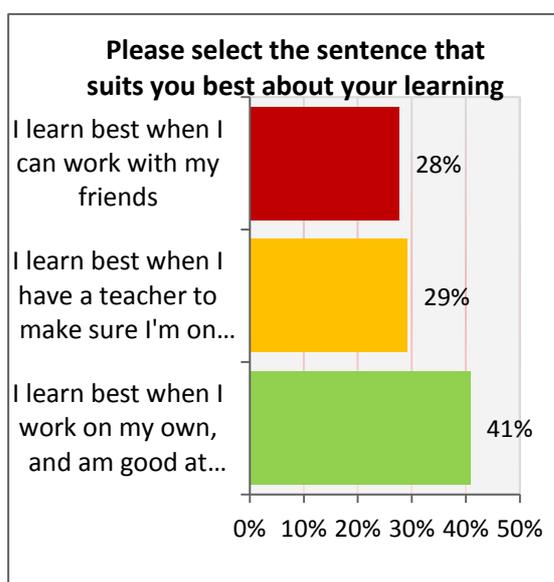


Some extra comments that students offered included:

- "I think that the biggest decisions are made by people we have never met and they have never met us so they can't know whether it is the right decision for us"(15 year old student)
- "Some teachers listen and take in our ideas and its really cool"(13 year old student)
- "I think that they would like to value everyone opinion but that is difficult with the huge number of students."(15 year old student)
- "They focus on what they want you to learn rather than what you want to learn" (11 year old student)

## STUDENT LEARNING STYLES

We asked students to tell us more about their learning style and 445 students answered the question. Students who responded were also asked why they responded the way they did.



Some of the comments that students provided are below:

- *"I am a really good at doing stuff by myself" (14 year old student)*
- *"I can self manage, but having friends working with me can help me get more involved"(13 year old student)*
- *"I do like working on my own, but I like to have a teacher to tell me amd explain when I get things wrong"(14 year old student)*
- *"I feel teachers need to steer me into the right direction" (14 year old student)*
- *"I tend to get wander of my work when I work alone but when I work with friends I get distracted by them. A teacher helps me stay on track whilst not distacting me." (13 year old student)*
- *"Me and my friends can work together and still get our must dos done" (11 year old student)*

## CONCLUSION

This report shows that students have valuable perspectives about their experiences with education. They have a holistic view about what achievement means at school, and many would like to be more active participants in the management and governance decisions made at the school.

We strongly encourage more consultation with children to take place before major changes are made to the Education Act. Children and young people are the expert users of the education system and should be treated as such.