

COMPASS: Whānau Pasifika navigating schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand

He whakarāpopototanga | Executive summary

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The COMPASS project is part of NZCER's Te Pae Tawhiti Government Grant Programme of Research. It is also aligned to the broad goals and aspirations of NZCER, in that its overarching purpose is to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the notion of Whakaterere Tōmua—Wayfinding.

The COMPASS project has examined the ways kaiako, ākonga, and whānau navigate educational experiences and contexts. Using quantitative and qualitative data from the Kia tū rangatira aī project, COMPASS has focused on examining the social-psychological conditions for school success from the perspectives of Māori and Pasifika students (n = 5,843), Pasifika whānau members (n = 362), and kaiako Māori (n = 311) from 102 schools across Aotearoa New Zealand.

He kitenga | Findings

This report focuses on the perspectives of whānau Pasifika as they express their attitudes and beliefs about what success looks like for their tamariki and why success is important. It employs the Indigenous practice of wayfinding to frame discussions of success through a range of values whānau Pasifika hold, and supportive characteristics they enact that steer their tamariki towards achieving their educational aspirations. Our research question for this study was: What are the Pasifika values that guide whānau as they navigate educational spaces and how are these anchored in Pasifika measures of success?

We identified a range of key Pacific values and characteristics that shape notions of success for Pasifika learners, according to whānau Pasifika. We define whānau characteristics as the way that whānau enact their values. The key Pacific values and characteristics were:

Pasifika value	Whānau characteristic
Belonging: feeling connection to whānau and culture and feeling secure in multiple identities.	Being involved in school life: being physically present at school and interacting with the teachers of their tamariki.
Whānau: a complex structure of supportive relationships guided by whakapapa, extending beyond the “nuclear” whānau.	Encouraging tamariki to succeed: by focusing on future success of tamariki, positive familial role models, pursuing their own passions/interests, growing perseverance, and using strengths-based approaches.
Respect: reflecting humility, engaging in mutually respectful and reciprocal relationships, and having a deep reverence for their cultural practices.	Offering practical support to tamariki: being present to help with homework, being communicative, and encouraging tamariki to feel and express cultural pride and connectedness.
Enactment of culture: participating in cultural events (including eating cultural kai and wearing Pasifika clothing), participating in cultural performances, and speaking one’s reo Moana.	Having a curriculum focus: focusing on supporting learning across core curriculum areas and helping tamariki to value their cultural knowledge and practices.

Following the star path and steering the waka simultaneously: Pasifika values aligning with characteristics and actions

Taken together, the study identified critical factors that serve as important navigational tools for whānau Pasifika to support the educational journeys of their tamariki:

- Whānau Pasifika must be understood and engaged as wayfinders, paramount to tamariki navigating successfully in educational contexts.
- The navigation of choppy educational seas is alleviated by whānau maintenance of reciprocal relationships and positive connections to communities.
- Respect and support for tamariki Pasifika is necessarily relational, maintaining a harmony where whānau walk alongside their tamariki, co-navigating adversity, keeping their eyes on the horizon, and steering them towards success.
- Whānau Pasifika are “edgewalkers”—helping their tamariki to adapt to being a part of the diaspora and achieving success by storying the powerful links between enacting culture and being curriculum focused for achievement.