
4. Meeting the needs of Pacific students

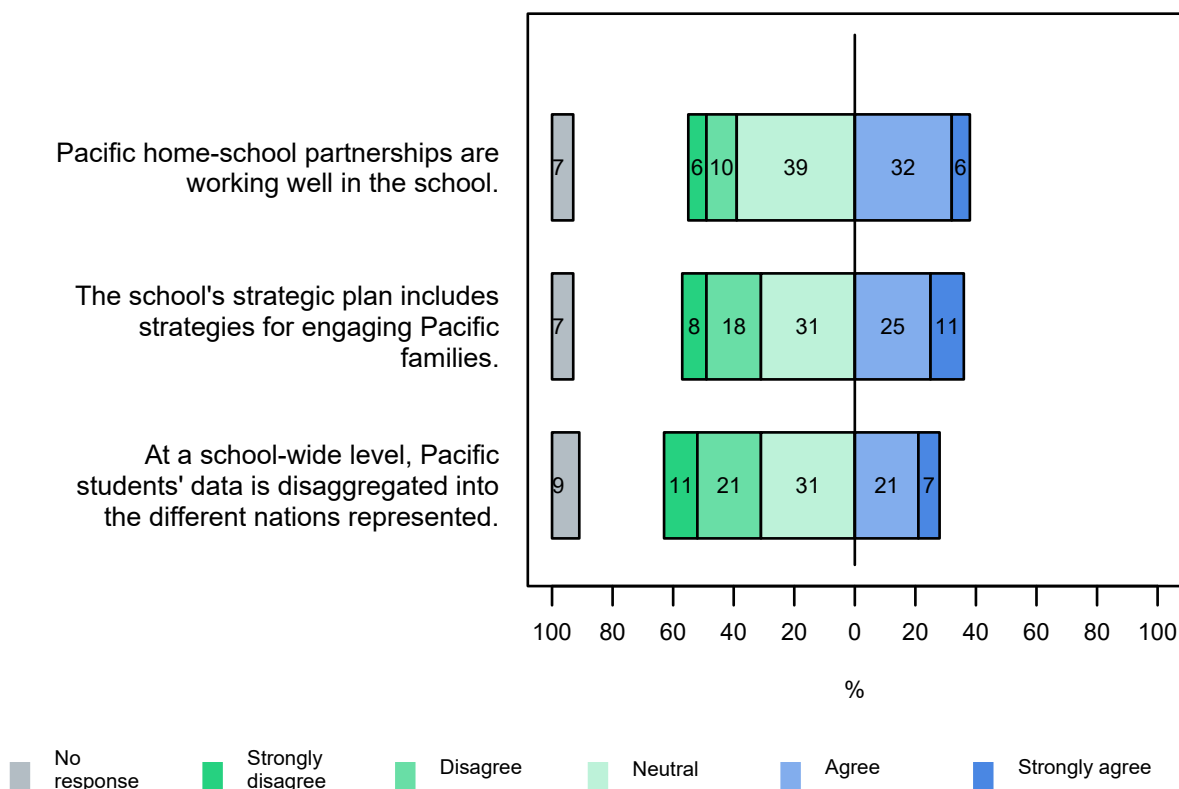
Pacific students make up 13% of Year 1–8 students. This broad grouping encompasses students from Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue, Fiji, and other Pacific Island cultures, most born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Students from these distinct cultures and languages tend to be clustered in areas and therefore in schools. Quite a few schools have no students from Pacific cultures.

In this section we first report primary schools' support for Pacific students and their families, their approaches to supporting Pacific students' wellbeing, and principals' responses to other items about the school and Pacific students. Then we turn to teachers' reports of how they support Pacific students' wellbeing, and their professional learning that helps this. We had 25 responses from Pacific parents and whānau, too few to report their views separately.

Support for Pacific students and their families varies

Just over a third of the principals said that their school's strategic plan included strategies to engage Pacific families, or that Pacific home-school partnerships were working well. Three-quarters of those who said Pacific home-school partnerships were working well also said their strategic plan had strategies to engage Pacific families. Somewhat fewer disaggregated Pacific student data by nation, as shown in Figure 20. The picture is much the same as it was in 2016.

FIGURE 20 School support for Pacific students and their families (Principals, n = 145)



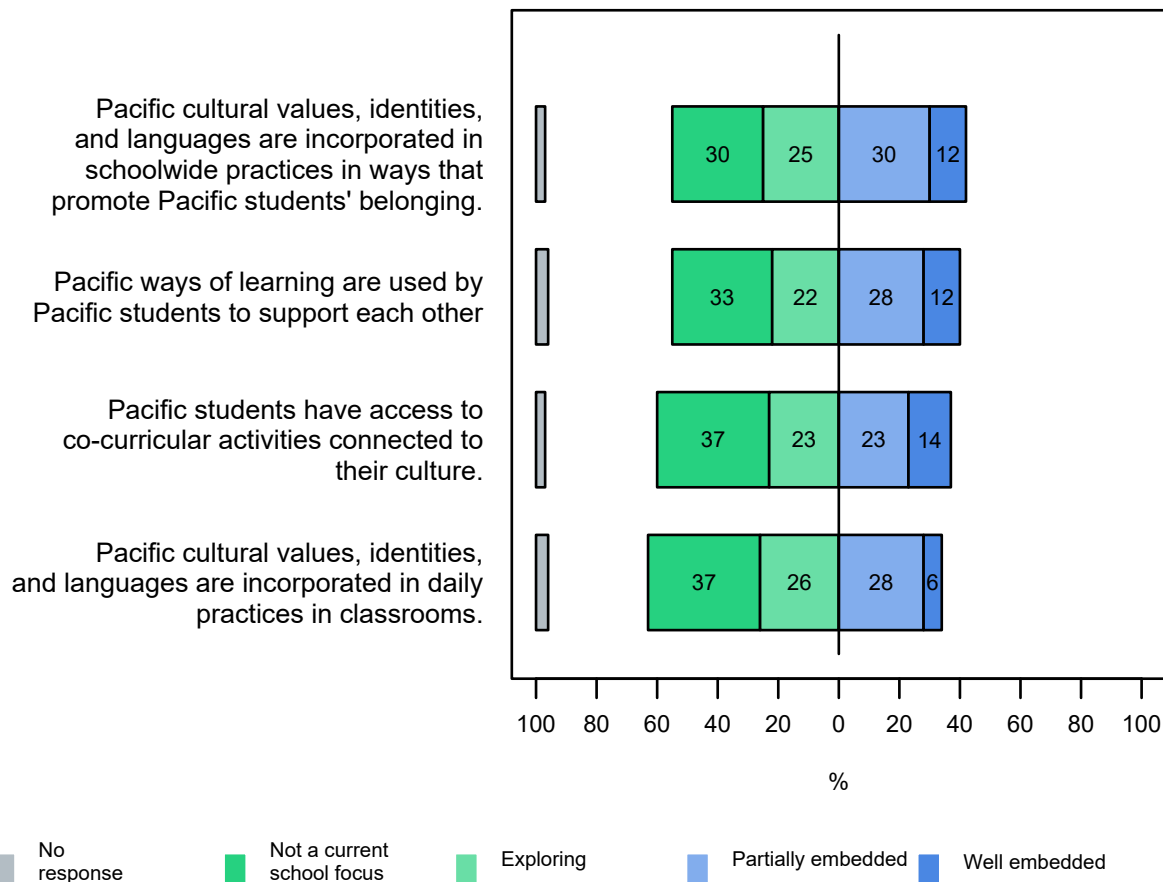
Disaggregating Pacific student data into their different nations was most evident in decile 1 and 2 schools (25% of these principals strongly agreed that they did this).

Twenty-six percent of the principals said they needed external expertise on engaging with Pacific families, but could not readily access this.

Pacific student wellbeing at school is variably supported

Over half the principals indicated that their school had embedded or was exploring the four approaches to supporting Pacific student wellbeing we asked about. Most of these were exploring or had partially embedded these approaches. Figure 21 shows the full picture here.

FIGURE 21 Schools' approaches to supporting Pacific student wellbeing (Principals, n = 145)



Decile 1 and 2 school principals had the highest proportion of principals reporting that they had well-embedded these approaches, other than the incorporation of Pacific cultural values, identities and languages in schoolwide practices, where there was no association with decile.

Pacific student achievement is more of a focus for schools

Pacific student achievement data played a significant role in 44% of the principals' school board decisionmaking (12% strongly agreed that it did). This has increased from 2016, when 28% of the principals said it played such a role, and 5% strongly agreed that it did.

When we asked whether their school needed external expertise to implement reliable strategies to support Pacific student learning, 29% of the principals responding said they needed this expertise, but could not access it, as did 21% in 2016. Eighteen percent needed it, but could access it; 48% said they did not need it: both proportions were much the same as in 2016.

Pacific student achievement was identified by 16% of the principals as a major issue facing their school, much the same as in 2016.

Most principals with Pacific students can identify effective practices in their school

We asked principals an open-ended question about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to improve outcomes for Pacific students; 130 comments were made, with 44 saying that they had no Pacific students.

Themes among those principals who described the most effective thing they had done and included:

- using students' languages, visual references to their countries and culture, focus on each nation periodically; for example, through national language week, language days, groups performing at school events
- parent engagement and home-school partnerships; for example, a termly So'otaga programme where students, parents and teachers set student learning goals together, and school parent fono
- improving teacher capability, through PLD, using Tapasā (a framework and set of resources for teachers developed by the Teaching Council)¹⁸, and staff appointments
- emphasis on students being aware of their own self-identity
- closer focus on Pacific learners' progress and supporting them to be active in seeking ongoing improvement, and teacher inquiry into the effectiveness of their work with Pacific learners.

Supporting transitions from Pacific language nests to provide language continuity is rare

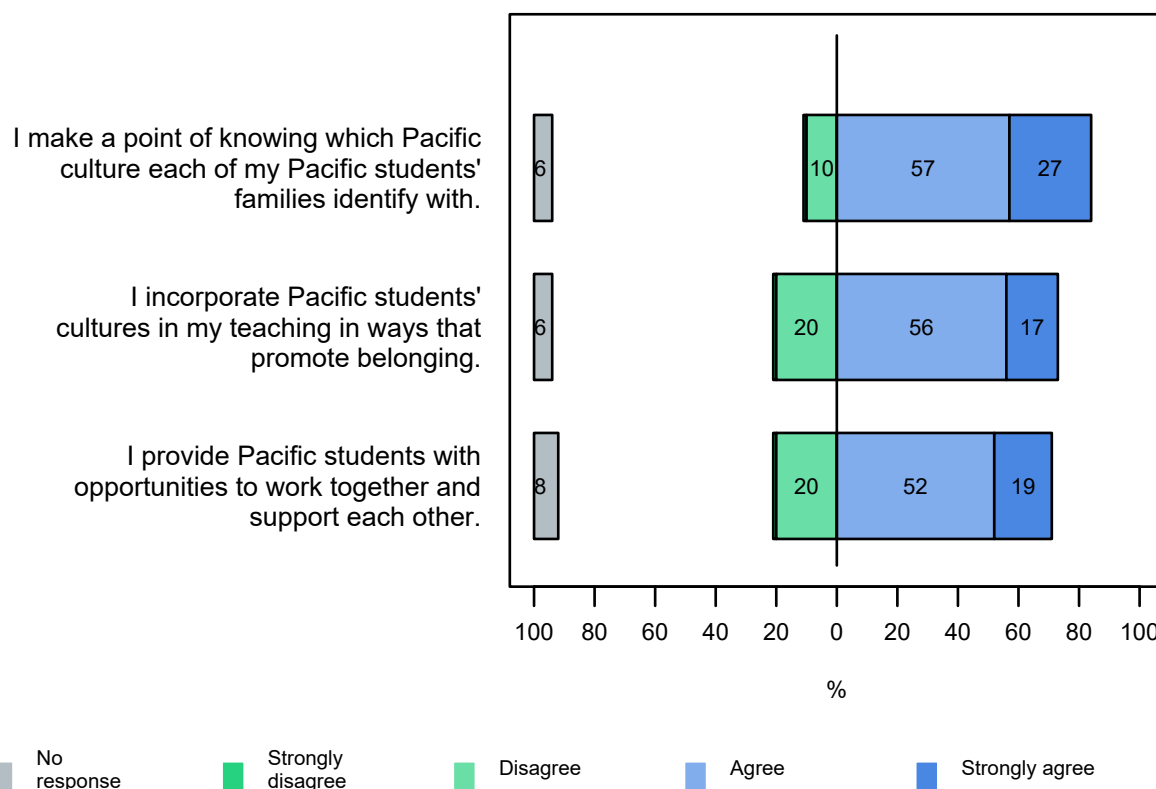
There are around 50 teacher-led Pacific language nests among the country's early learning services, mainly Tongan and Samoan; 29 primary schools offering Pacific language medium of instruction for some or more of the time, and another 10 offering a specific Pacific language as a curriculum subject. Not surprisingly then, in our sample only 7% of principals said their school worked closely with local Pacific language nests to support the transition of their children to the school, and only 4% of the principals said that children transitioning from Pacific language nests could continue learning their language in the school.

Teachers' support for Pacific students has improved since 2016

Making a point of knowing which Pacific culture each student identified with, incorporating these cultures in teaching to promote belonging, and providing opportunities for Pacific students to work together and support each other are practices reported by most primary teachers. Figure 22 shows more agreement than strong agreement with the items we asked about. Between 10 and 20% of teachers disagreed with these items.

18 <https://teachingcouncil.nz/content/tapas%C4%81-cultural-competencies-framework-teachers-of-pacific-learners>

FIGURE 22 Teacher support for Pacific students (n = 620)



There has been a marked increase since 2016 in teachers agreeing that they include these practices in their teaching, though little change at the 'strongly agree' level. Table 4 shows the increases at the 'agree' level.

TABLE 4 Increases in teachers agreeing that they include practices to support Pacific students' learning and wellbeing, 2016 and 2019

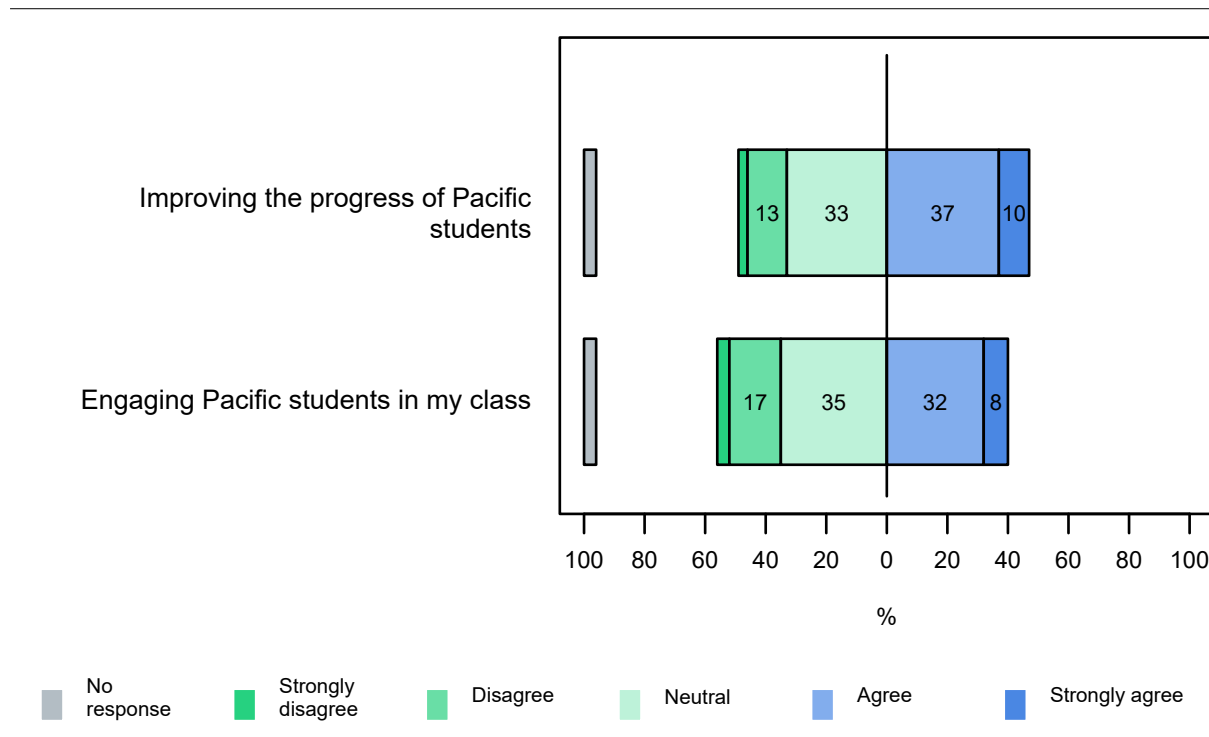
	2016 (n = 771) % agree	2019 (n = 620) % agree
I make a point of knowing which Pacific culture each of my Pacific students' families identify with.	42	57
I incorporate Pacific students' cultures in my teaching in ways that promote belonging.	37	56
I provide Pacific students with opportunities to work together and support each other.	36	52

Decile 1 and 2 schools have the highest enrolment of Pacific students, and teachers in these schools were the ones most likely to strongly agree with these items.

Practical help from professional learning to engage Pacific students shows little change

We asked teachers what practical help they had had from their professional learning in the last 3 years to engage Pacific students in their class (much the same picture as in 2016) and to improve their progress, a new item added in 2019. Figure 23 shows that 47% had such help around improving the progress of Pacific students, and 40% around engaging them in teachers' classes.

FIGURE 23 Practical help from professional learning to support Pacific students (Teachers, *n* = 620)



Decile 1 and 2 school teachers had the highest proportion reporting strong agreement that they had had practical help from their professional learning here: 26% in relation to professional learning that gave practical help to improve Pacific student achievement, and 20%, Pacific student engagement in their class.

Summary

The clustered nature of Pacific student enrolment was reflected in school support and teacher professional learning. Decile 1 and 2 schools were the most attentive to Pacific learners and their families. However, there was a marked increase in principals' reports that Pacific student achievement data played a significant role in their school board decision making, and slightly more awareness that it was difficult to find external expertise to help them implement reliable strategies to improve Pacific student learning. Many of the principals with Pacific students can identify effective practices they are using as well. More teachers were including practices that support Pacific students' learning than in 2016.