

8.

Trustee perspectives and the work of school boards

In the NZCER national surveys, we send two questionnaires via the school to the board chair. We ask the chair to give one questionnaire to another board member other than the principal or teacher representative, preferably one who might have a different view on some issues. Fifty-nine percent of those who responded in 2015 were board chairs, up from 49% in 2012.

Board chairs tend to be longer serving (60% in the 2015 national survey had been on their board for 5 or more years, compared with 25% of other trustees), and to carry more responsibility, so it is likely that the picture here reflects these facts. However, on the whole, chairs and other trustees responding gave similar responses. Any marked differences in the views of chairs and other trustees are noted. Principals' and parents' 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, are also included here.

Our 2012 survey found particularly strong decile-related differences in trustee experiences and views, so we continue to analyse trustee responses in terms of school decile in 2015. We have added location as a variable of interest to see how experiences differ for rural trustees, whose schools are often smaller in size and further away from support. Bearing in mind the small number of rural trustees responding ($n = 14$), we found some overlap of school decile and location, with 36% of the rural trustees responding to this survey coming from decile 1–2 schools, compared with 12% overall.

Trustee experience and paths to the secondary trustee role

Secondary school trustees often came to their role with previous experience of serving on a primary or intermediate school board of trustees (BoT) (48%). Three percent of those who responded had also served on another secondary school's board. Sixty-one percent also had experience of serving on other organisational boards: 28% had been on the boards of non-government organisations employing staff, as school boards do; 25% on business boards; 22% on non-government organisations that did not employ staff; and 16% on the boards of other organisations. Board chairs had more experience on other boards: 33% had served on business boards, compared with 14% of other trustees, and 32% on the boards of voluntary organisations employing staff, compared with 21% of other trustees.

Experience on business boards was related to school socioeconomic decile, increasing from 11% of the decile 1–2 school trustees, to 40% of the decile 9–10 school trustees. Metropolitan trustees had more business board experience (31%, compared with 15% in small cities and in towns).

This picture of trustees' previous experience has remained stable over the 2009, 2012 and 2015 national surveys.

Most secondary trustees were also in paid employment, 58% as employees and 33% self-employed. Fewer trustees were self-employed in decile 1–2 schools (15%), and more were not in paid employment (22%, compared with 7% overall). This may relate to the higher proportion of decile 1–2 school trustees who were aged 60 or over (19%, compared with 7% overall).

Some support from their employment for their school trustee role was evident: 41% could use some paid time for their role, and 34% could use some work equipment. Thirty-seven percent could use work hours flexibly if they needed to for their school board work, so long as they put in their hours. Self-employed trustees had more flexibility here: 50% used some paid time, compared with 36% of employees, and 42% used some work equipment, compared with 29% of employees.

Compared with 2013 Census figures for the 40–59-year age group (40% of the trustees were in their forties, and 47% in their fifties) secondary trustees were much more highly qualified. Nationally, only 20% of this age group have a tertiary degree. More than half the secondary trustees responding had a tertiary degree, and only 2% had no qualification, compared with 20% nationally for this age group. Seventy-eight percent of the trustees in decile 9–10 schools have a tertiary degree, with the lowest proportion in decile 1–2 schools (37%).

Eighty-four percent of the trustees responding were NZ European/Pākehā, 14% were Māori and 2% from Pasifika cultures. Two percent were of Asian ethnicity and 7% identified with "other" ethnic groups.⁶⁰ Māori comprised 48% of the decile 1–2 school trustees responding, and 22% of the decile 3–4 school trustees.

More women took part in the 2015 national survey (52%, compared with 39% in 2012; nationally women comprise 46% of secondary trustees).

Trustees responding to the survey had been on their board for a median time of 3.75 years, somewhat less than the median time of 4.33 years found in the 2012 national survey. Board chairs had longer experience: a median of 5.17 years, compared with a median of 2.25 years for other board members.

Table 30 shows that the main driver for taking on school board responsibility was to contribute to the community. Just over a quarter wanted to improve their school's achievement levels. Not many went onto a school board to change things at the school, or because they felt the school lacks leadership. Table 30 also shows that the drivers or attractions of school board membership have been pretty stable over time, with some drop in those who wanted to change things, and some increase in those who had been

⁶⁰ Respondents could indicate affiliation with more than one ethnic group.

asked to come onto the board (indicating that boards were thinking strategically about their membership composition and numbers).

TABLE 30 Trustees' reasons for joining their secondary school board; 2009, 2012 and 2015

Reason	2009 (n = 267) %	2012 (n = 289) %	2015 (n = 232) %
To contribute to the community	85	78	83
To help my child/children	58	55	56
I have particular skills that are useful	*	56	54
I was asked	49	44	54
I wanted to learn how the school operated	*	*	28
I wanted to improve achievement levels	26	26	27
I wanted to change things at the school	22	16	12
Not many people were standing	*	*	8
Leadership at the school was lacking	8	5	6

* Not asked

More board members who were not chairs mentioned that they had joined their school board because of particular skills they had (62%, compared with 49% of board chairs), or a desire to learn how the school operated (46%, compared with 15% of board chairs). Trustees from decile 3–4 schools had the highest proportion saying they joined their board to change things at the school (27%), or because leadership was lacking (20%). Rural trustees also showed interest in changing things at their school (six of the 14 responding).

The role of boards

Much board work occurs in relation to meetings, which are often monthly. Board chairs work more closely with principals. Half of secondary trustees spent from 2 to 5 hours a week on their board work, much the same as in previous national surveys. Board chairs spent more time: only 10% carried out their role in 1 or 2 hours a week, compared with 54% of other trustees. A third of the chairs spent at least 6 hours a week in their role, an increase from the 26% who did so in 2012.

Table 31 below shows how parents (who vote for trustees), trustees and principals answered the question "What do you think are the key element(s) in the role of the board of trustees?" Providing strategic direction was foremost. Board members and parents had similar views. The pattern of principals' answers was similar, but with much higher proportions. Not many in all three groups saw that the board's role was to oversee the principal, and only a minority of parents and board members thought that the key element in the role of school boards is the employment of the school's principal. Reflecting the emphasis on school self-management since 1989, few saw that a key element in their school board's work was representing the government interest.

TABLE 31 Views on the key elements of the board of trustees' role

Key element of board role	Parents and whānau (n = 1,242) %	Trustees (n = 232) %	Principals (n = 182) %
Provide strategic direction for school	78	86	83
Support school staff/principal	52	46	78
Represent parents and whānau in the school	49	42	69
Oversee school finances	36	34	62
Scrutinise school performance	33	41	63
Employ school principal	22	30	51
Oversee school principal	20	16	31
Agent of government/representing government interest	10	5	8

Fewer parents at decile 1–2 schools identified providing the strategic direction for the school as a key element in the BoT role (56%), scrutinising school performance (13%) or overseeing the school finances (13%), compared with parents at all other schools. There were no decile-related differences among the trustees' and principals' answers here. Board chairs were more likely to mention:

- the scrutiny of school performance (47%, compared with 31% of other trustees)
- the employment of the school principal (37%, compared with 20%)
- the oversight of the principal (20%, compared with 10% of other trustees).

School location showed some relationships with perceptions of the key elements in the BoT role. Few metropolitan trustees identified overseeing the principal as a key element in the BoT role: 10%; trustees of schools in towns were most likely to identify this as a key element (29%).

Many secondary school trustees (71%) and principals (64%) thought that the amount of responsibility asked of school boards is about right; 24% of trustees and 31% of principals thought too much is asked of trustees. This pattern has stayed much the same since 2009.

More chairs than other trustees thought the amount of responsibility asked of school boards was too much: 29%, compared with 16%, a similar picture to 2012.

Two-thirds of the trustees made a comment on their responsibilities of their role. These comments included:

- the importance of having a good-calibre board, focused on governance (14%)
- the complexity and sometimes daunting nature of the role (12%)
- the importance of good partnership with the school principal (11%)
- time-consuming or time-pressured expectations of volunteers (8%)
- the sense that the responsibilities of the role were not matched by what trustees could control (6%).

What secondary school boards spent most of their time on was related to the emphasis they give to providing a strategic direction to the school. When we asked trustees to rank a range of board activity by the amount of time spent on it, student progress and achievement topped the list (see Figure 39). Attention to financial management and property/maintenance followed.

FIGURE 39 Main activities of boards in terms of time,⁶¹ reported by trustees (n = 232)

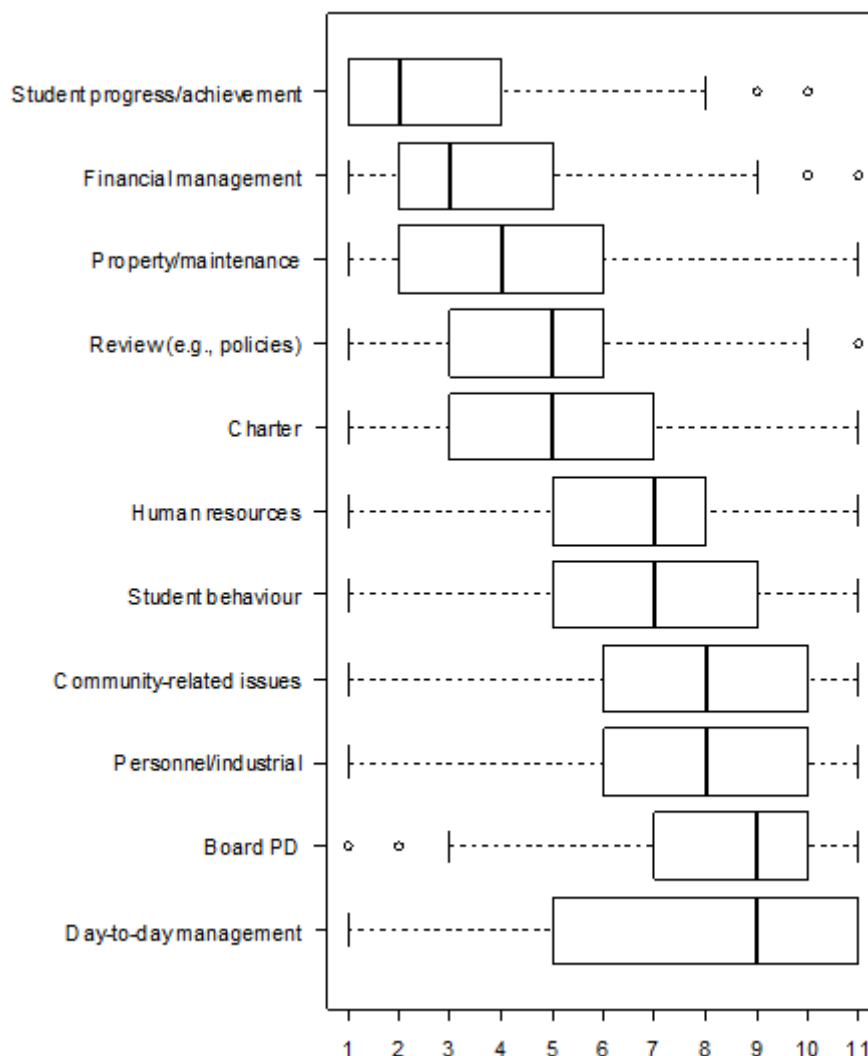


Figure 39 shows also the wide range between boards in how much time they gave to particular aspects of their role (or, in the case of day-to-day management, what they should not be doing as the school's governing body). Thus almost all the aspects we asked about have at least one trustee saying that was what their board spent most of its time on over the past year, and most aspects have at least one trustee saying that was what their board spent most time on.

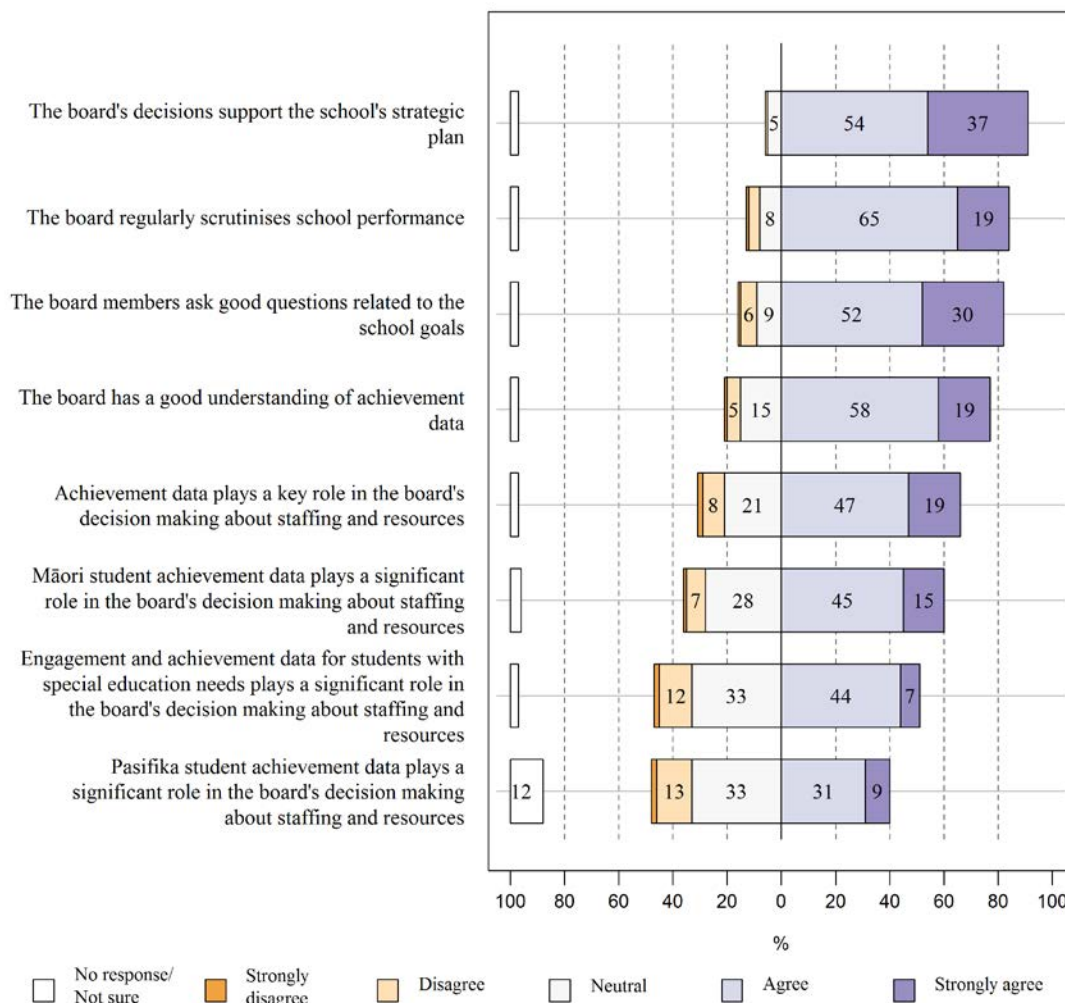
Financial management was identified among the top three areas that boards gave time to more by trustees in decile 7–10 schools (varying between 68 to 70%), and least often by trustees in decile 1–2 schools (30%). This may be related to the latter being most likely to identify a lack of financial expertise on their board. Student behaviour occupied less board time for trustees in decile 7–10 schools (8 to 10% put this among their top three areas, compared with a range of 19 to 24% for trustees in decile 1–6

⁶¹ In order of the median ranking given. The figure is a “box and whiskers” graph, with the line in the middle of the box showing the median ranking (on a scale of 1–11), and the left hand side of the box indicating the spread of the 25% of scores above the median, and the right hand side of the box indicating the spread of 25% of scores below the median, with the single bars indicating the full range, and dots, extreme outliers.

schools). Trustees in decile 1–4 schools were giving priority to their own board professional development: 15–20% included this in one of their top three areas, compared with none of the decile 9–10 school trustees.

We asked principals, as the school’s professional leader employed by the board, for their perspectives on how their board worked. Figure 40 shows that most secondary principals saw their boards actively paying attention to achievement data in both their scrutiny of school performance and decision making about resource allocation. This was more at the “agree” than “strongly agree” level.

FIGURE 40 Principal views of their board’s scrutiny and decision making (n = 182)



Achievements

Student achievement and financial management also headed the set of achievements that trustees could identify for their board over the past year: as they did in 2012 and 2009, in similar proportions. Table 32 shows some interesting patterns since 2009 that also present some puzzles. Why, for example, did only a quarter of trustees report an improvement in their school's student behaviour in 2015, compared with 42% who said so in 2012, and the 35% in 2009? Is it that earlier efforts have paid off? (The decline in the proportion of trustees identifying student behaviour as an issue (see Table 51 in *Chapter 13: Issues facing secondary schools in 2015*) would back this interpretation.) Why has the proportion of trustees who think they have maintained the range of courses their school provides halved? Why has the proportion of trustees reporting improvement in Māori student achievement not increased since 2012, when this has been a government priority area? Overall, are the initiatives in the secondary sector coherent? Why is it that fewer than half of trustees felt that their board had made progress on their school targets over the past year? Was it the nature of the targets? Or perhaps this response reflects information trustees had (or did not have) to judge.

TABLE 32 Trustees' views of their board's main achievements; 2009, 2012 and 2015

Board main achievements over past year	2009 (n = 267) %	2012 (n = 289) %	2015 (n = 232) %
Good financial monitoring	65	71	67
Improvements in student progress and achievement [#]	63	63	61
Greater focus on student achievement	65	55	59
Improved our governance processes	*	*	55
More use of digital technology in learning	*	42	55
Quality of teaching stayed high or improved	46	57	50
Improved our buildings [~]	55	59	49
Improvements in Māori student progress and achievement [#]	42	49	47
Made progress on our school targets	*	49	46
Effective review of the school charter	*	*	43
Good ERO report	55 [◇]	39	37
Improved the pathways we provide students in terms of qualifications	*	25	31
Improvements in Pasifika student progress and achievement [#]	16	24	29
Improved our board capability through professional development and advice	*	*	27
Improvements in student behaviour	35	42	26
Improvements in student attendance	*	27	25
Community/parent involvement in student learning increased	*	*	20
Maintained the range of courses we can provide	*	39	19
Appointed a new principal	19	16	15

*Not asked

~ 2009 and 2012 item asked about "buildings and grounds"

2009 and 2012 item asked about student achievement

◇ This predates ERO's 2009–10 introduction of differentiated reviews and the 4–5-year review return category.

Improvements in student attendance were noted most by trustees of decile 1–4 schools (about 40%). Increased community/parental involvement in learning was noted most by trustees of decile 1–2 schools (37%). Maintaining the school's range of courses was noted most as a board achievement by decile 5–6 school trustees (33%) and by decile 9–10 school trustees (25%). A higher proportion of decile 1–2 school trustees noted new appointments of principals (37%). Good ERO reports were noted most by trustees from decile 7–10 schools (48%).

Fewer rural trustees noted achievements than others, though they were ahead in noting improvements in their board capability through professional development (seven of the 14).

Consultation with the school's community

Although community-related issues appeared toward the end of the list of what boards spend most of their time on, boards are legally required to consult with their communities, and this informs their strategic thinking.

Most of the trustees (82%) said their board had consulted with the school's community in the past 12 months:

- Public meetings or workshops at the school (55% of trustees), and written surveys of parents and whānau (54%) were the most common means of consulting.
- Email surveys were more common: 39% in 2015, up from 25% in 2012.
- Boards had also invited parents and whānau to board meetings or workshops (34% of trustees), included questions in the school newsletter (27%), held public meetings or workshops in the community (21%, up from 15% in 2012) and met with specific groups of parents (e.g., families of students with special needs) (21%, up from 12% in 2012).
- Nineteen percent of trustees said their board consulted through a hui. Hui occurred most in decile 1–2 schools (55% of trustees).
- Phone surveys were not common (9% of trustees), nor were home meetings (7%).

As with many other organisations that consult their stakeholders, a minority of these stakeholders participated in consultation. Twenty-five percent of the trustees said approximately 10% or fewer of their school's parents had taken part in their board's consultation, 23% said 11–25% had taken part and 15% said between 26–50%. Just a few said they had had more than half their parents participate (7%).⁶² A higher proportion of decile 1–2 school trustees reported this high level of parent participation (23%).

Forty percent of the trustees thought their board's consultation methods were generally successful, and 38% thought some of the methods had been successful.

Just under half the parents who responded to our parent survey said they felt genuinely consulted by their school, an increase from the 41% who felt this in 2012, and the 34% who felt this in 2009. A further 26% were unsure about this. Somewhat more decile 9–10 school parents felt genuinely consulted (57%).

Thirty-five percent of parents thought they did not have enough contact with their school's BoT. (We did not ask for comments here, but in previous surveys parents have mentioned their own lack of time as a factor, as well as wishing their school board to communicate more.) Feeling they did not have enough contact with their school trustees was highest among decile 1–2 school parents (54%), decreasing to 31% of decile 9–10 school parents.

Student achievement, reporting to parents and whānau, and working with parents and whānau top the list of things that secondary boards consulted their school community about. However, the figures for these are not high, indicating that each school's consultation was quite contextual. Table 33 shows the wide range of issues that school boards consulted on.

62 A quarter did not know what proportion of parents had participated.

TABLE 33 **School community consultation, reported by secondary trustees (n = 232)**

34–27% of trustees reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student achievement Reporting to parents and whānau Curriculum options School charter
25–21%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School culture Provision for Māori Health and wellbeing School uniform
19–14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of digital technology Student pathways to qualifications Student attendance Student behaviour Student safety
13–11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision for Pasifika School trips Property Co-curricular activities
9–5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress on annual plan target/goals Sex education Local iwi education priorities Incorporating te reo and tikanga Māori Timetabling Becoming part of a CoS Enrolment scheme Funding Provision for students with special needs Provision for students with English as a second language

Trustees from decile 1–2 schools were more likely to report that their board had consulted on student achievement (55%), attendance (50%), pathways to qualifications (46%) and safety (32%). Only metropolitan schools consulted on their enrolment scheme.

Issues raised by parents

Parents also raise issues themselves with boards: 70% of the trustees had experience of this in the 2015 year. These issues were also quite wide ranging. Student behaviour and dissatisfaction with a staff member were most likely to be raised, as they were in the 2009 and 2012 national secondary surveys, this year in somewhat higher proportions.

TABLE 34 **Issues raised by parents with their secondary school board, reported by trustees**
(*n* = 163)

Top issues	Student behavior (47% of trustees where parents had raised issues, 35% in 2012, 43% in 2009) Dissatisfaction with staff member (44%, 27% in 2012, 31% in 2009)
29–15% of trustees	School uniform Costs for parents and whānau Provision for students with special educational needs Digital technology Student achievement
14–12%	Provision for Māori students Funding Health and safety Curriculum (14%, up from 6% in 2012 and 7% in 2009) Placement of students Transport (12%, up from 7% in 2012, and same as 12% in 2009)
9–5%	School zone Grounds/maintenance NCEA Co-curricular provision Theft/vandalism Class sizes

Student achievement was reported as an issue raised by parents by a higher proportion of decile 1–2 school trustees (50%). Other parent-raised issues reported more often by decile 1–2 school trustees were theft or vandalism (25%), and provision for Pasifika students (20%, compared with 3% overall). Provision for students with special needs was identified as an issue raised by parents by a higher proportion of decile 3–4 school trustees (38%).

Dissatisfaction with a staff member was a parent-raised issue for a higher proportion of town trustees (71%).

Board capability

Both trustees and principals were positive about how well their school board was doing, though more principals than trustees saw their board at either end of the spectrum of how well they were undertaking the responsibilities of a school board. Few principals or trustees saw their boards as (simply) coping or struggling. This picture has remained much the same since 2009.

TABLE 35 **Trustee and principal views of how their board is doing**

View	On top of its task %	Making steady progress %	Coping or struggling %
Trustees (<i>n</i> = 232)	34	57	6
Principals (<i>n</i> = 182)	41	46	12

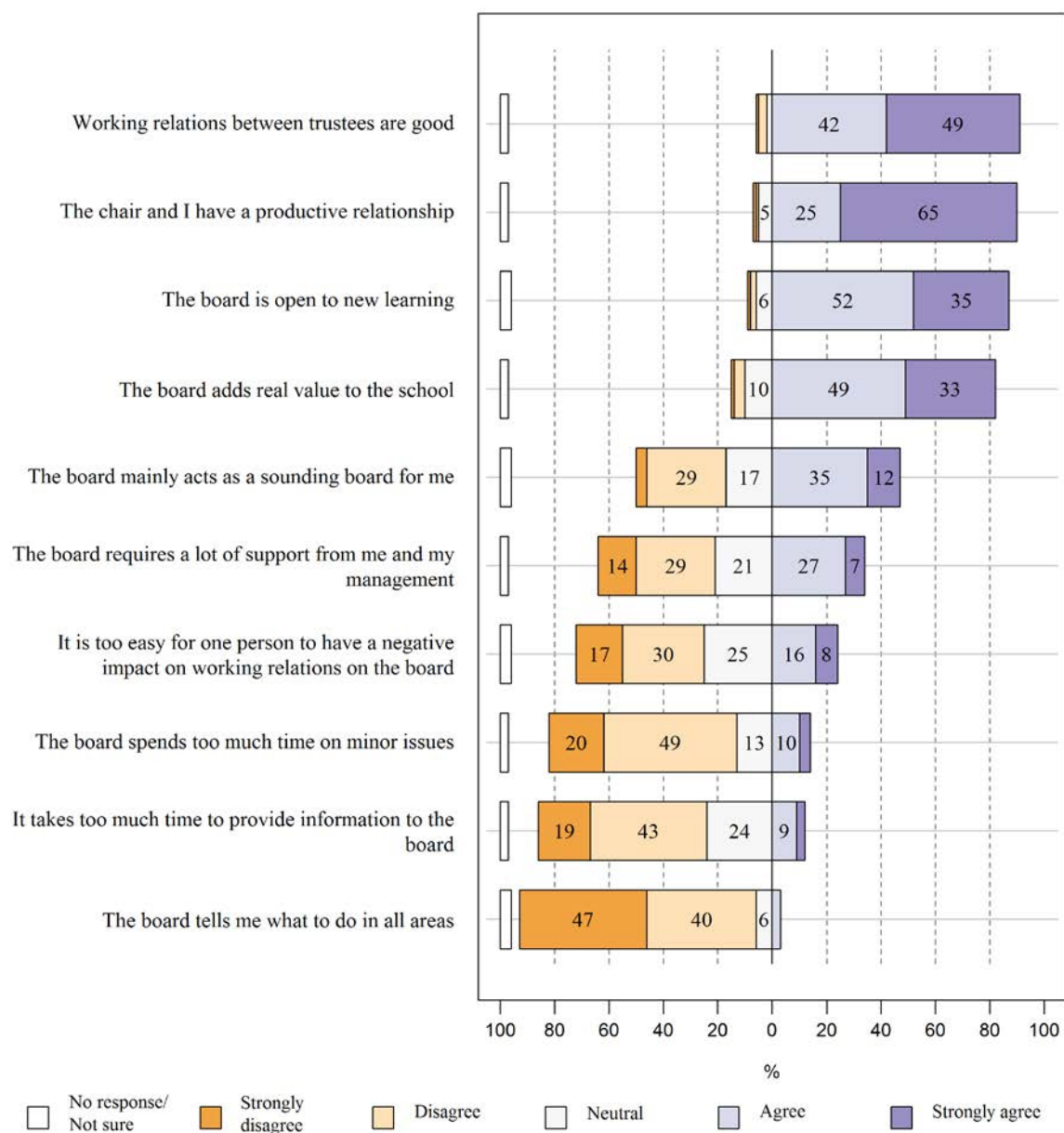
Only 5% of decile 1–2 school principals thought their board was on top of its task, compared with 61% of decile 9–10 school principals. School location was also related: only 11% of rural school principals thought this, compared with 50% of metropolitan school principals.

Among trustees, there was no difference related to school decile, but there was a similar difference related to school location: three of the 14 rural school trustees saw their board as simply coping, as did 15% of those in towns, compared with 6% of trustees of small city schools and 3% of those in metropolitan schools.

Forty-one percent of trustees said their board regularly reviewed its own processes, as recommended, and 47% said they did this sometimes. This is much the same as in 2012 and 2009.

Figure 41 shows that most principals saw their school board adding real value to the school, and focusing on the issues that matter. Relationships were largely productive between the school’s professional leader and board chair. However, around a third saw their board as needing a lot of support.

FIGURE 41 Principals' views of their board (n = 182)



While principals' views were largely unrelated to their school decile, decile 9–10 school principals were the most positive about their school board in these key respects:

- 69% strongly agreed that working relations between trustees were good (decreasing to 30% of decile 1–2 principals)
- 56% strongly agreed that the board added real value to the school (decreasing to 21% of decile 3–4 school principals, and 25% of decile 1–2 school principals)
- 53% strongly agreed that the board's decisions supported the school's strategic plan (decreasing to 24% of decile 3–4 school principals, and 25% of decile 1–2 school principals)
- 44% strongly agreed that board members asked good questions related to school goals (decreasing to 10% of decile 1–2 school principals).

A higher proportion of decile 1–2 school principals strongly agreed that it was too easy for one person to have a negative impact on the board's working relations (25%).

Just over half the secondary principals (52%) had struck some problem in their relationships with members of their school board during their time as a principal. This was slightly more than in 2012, but much the same as in 2009. Most of these problems were minor (31% with their current board, 4% at a previous school). Fifteen percent overall had struck major problems in their relationships with members of their school board, including 12% at their current school, and 4% at their previous school.⁶³ Consistent with the more positive responses given by decile 9–10 school principals about their current board, none of those experiencing major problems currently were from decile 9–10 schools.

We also asked principals about what they had gained from their last annual performance appraisal, which is the board's responsibility. This is reported in *Chapter 7: Principals' perspectives on their work*. A higher proportion of decile 9–10 school principals had been able to frankly discuss the school's challenges and do some joint strategic thinking through this process than others (53%, decreasing to 20% of decile 1–2 school principals).

Board numbers and expertise

The smallest number of board members other than the principal, the staff representative and student representative was four, with a median number of six and a maximum of 13. Two-thirds of the trustees said their board had co-opted at least one of its members. Trustees from decile 7–10 schools reported larger boards: only 18% had four to five elected or co-opted members, compared with 31 to 42% for trustees from decile 1–6 schools. This difference may reflect the higher proportion of integrated schools among the decile 7–10 schools, since integrated schools had more trustees (a median of nine, compared with six trustees for state schools). In terms of locality, town trustees reported the fewest numbers on their board (52% had four to five members).

Twenty percent of the trustees said their board had all the expertise it needed. Experience or skills that were lacking ranged widely, again indicating particular local contexts and board composition. Higher proportions of trustees in 2015 than in 2012 mentioned a lack of expertise in strategic planning, community consultation, understanding achievement data, links with local employers and property (between 16–20% in 2015, and 11–15% in 2012). Financial expertise continues to be most mentioned (23%), along with links with local iwi (22%) and legal expertise (21%).

Decile 1–2 school trustees were more likely to say that their board lacked experience or skills in finance (52%), strategic planning (44%), community consultation (41%), understanding achievement data (37%), links with local iwi (37%), review of school performance (37%), governance (33%), the employer role (30%) and leadership (22%).

Rural trustees were more likely to see gaps for their board in the areas of property (six of the 14 responding), governance (six), understanding achievement data (six), finance (five), review of school performance (five), strategic planning (five) and the employer role (four).

Support for the trustee role

Almost all the trustees (91%) had some ready access to information at their school to help them in their role. School leadership played a key role here: the principal was a source of regularly shared relevant new information and reports from government (79%), and useful background material for key decisions the board was making (73%). Many, but not all, were on boards that had a policy framework (72%).

⁶³ Some principals had struck problems with their board at both their current and previous schools.

Half could access information they needed online. Forty-seven percent were on boards that gave new members an induction folder; 44% could look at archives or records of previous board papers. Only 17% belonged to boards that had a library of relevant material (perhaps reflecting the dominance of online material).

Trustees were also supported over the past 12 months within their school by guidance and information from fellow trustees (66%, a marked increase from the 42% who reported this in 2012), and from school staff members (66%, increased from 55% in 2012). Discussions with ERO during their review of the school were helpful for 39%. Thirty-four percent had used the NZSTA government-funded helpdesk (45% of board chairs and 18% of other trustees had done so). Twenty-two percent had regular contact with trustees in other schools.

Most of the trustees responding (84%) had also had some form of professional development for their role over the past 12 months. Sixty-two percent had participated in NZSTA-provided and mainly government-funded professional development as shown in Table 36.

TABLE 36 Trustee participation in NZSTA-provided workshops and professional development

NZSTA workshops and professional development	(n = 232) %
Board's role in student achievement	32
Finance	16
Hautū tool (cultural responsiveness)	16
NZSTA provider worked with school	15
Policy framework	15
Employer role	15
NZSTA annual conference	15
Principal performance management	14
Board chair residential programme	14
Online modules	10

Trustees also gained knowledge and skills for their governance role through professional development in their paid work (41%). Just 8% had gone on other courses or had mentoring or coaching paid for by their school. Other sources mentioned were other NZSTA professional development (8%), Catholic Education Office (3%) and through non-governmental organisation (NGO) or voluntary work (2%).

More board chairs than other trustees took part in NZSTA-funded professional development on principal performance management, finance and policy framework; and more board chairs also had access to relevant learning through their paid work. A quarter had undertaken NZSTA's board chair residential programme.

Trustees in decile 1–2 schools had the highest proportion of NZSTA conference attendance (33%). More of decile 1–2 and decile 3–4 school trustees, which also have higher Māori enrolment than higher decile schools, had taken part in workshops introducing the Hautū tool (26%). Rural trustees had the highest proportion participating in the principal performance management workshop (six of the 14 responding).

Government-funded advice from NZSTA was also a prime support. Over the past year, 36% of trustees had had advice from an NZSTA Human Resources adviser on their school policies (46% of board chairs, and 21% of other trustees), and 35% had sought advice from an NZSTA Industrial Relations adviser (46% of board chairs, and 18% of other trustees).

ERO was a source of advice for 33%, as was the regional Ministry of Education office for 32%. Professional development in their paid work was another source of advice for the governance role (34%: 41% of board chairs and 24% of other trustees). A quarter had worked as a whole board with a contracted adviser paid for by their school. Four percent had had individual coaching or mentoring paid for by their school.

A higher proportion of decile 1–2 school trustees had had advice from ERO (63%), probably reflecting their ERO review report levels (see *Chapter 11: Support and Challenge* and had worked with a contracted adviser (44%), probably reflecting their priority for support.

Thirteen percent said they had received no advice for their trustee role over the past year. A greater proportion of small city trustees said they had not had advice for their role (27%).

Only 5% of secondary trustees said professional development and advice for their role over the past 12 months had had no impact or not changed anything much, though 45% said that their experiences had affirmed what they were already doing. Table 37 shows that this work with experts beyond their own school was important for many trustees in terms of understanding their responsibilities; and for a minority, in terms of important decisions they needed to make.

TABLE 37 **Impact for trustees of professional development and advice**

Impact	(n = 232) %
Better understanding of trustee role	53
Affirmed what we were already doing	45
Ensured our board processes were compliant with the law	41
Improved our strategic planning	41+
Better understanding of the board's role as employer	36+
Better understanding of how to review school progress	32
Better understanding of the achievement information we get from school staff	28
Helped us resolve a difficult situation	28
Helped us improve our annual planning and reporting	26
Better understanding of the financial information we get from school staff	17
Helped us make some hard decisions/avoid some costly mistakes	17+
Helped us with our consultation processes	15
Helped us appoint a new principal	12+

+ Increase since 2012

Decile 1–2 school trustees were most likely to note impact from advice and professional development in terms of a gaining better understanding of how to review school progress (59%), of the financial information from school staff (33%) and help with consultation processes (30%).

With regard to school location, more rural school trustees thought they had a better understanding of how to review school progress (eight of the 14), of achievement information (seven of the 14) and of financial information from school staff (five of the 14). A higher proportion of small city trustees said they also had a better understanding of achievement information (42%), and of the financial information (31%). More town trustees had used their professional development and advice to resolve a difficult situation (40%). Some of these differences are likely to reflect NZSTA targeting of its professional development and support.

NZSTA, the Ministry of Education and ERO have all published guidance for school boards; much of it overlapping, or exemplifying core principles applied to different priority areas. National reports produced by the Ministry of Education, ERO and NZQA are also useful sources of information and understanding. Table 38 shows that the most used written resources were those that come regularly from NZSTA. NZSTA resources are in bold in the table, and Ministry of Education material in italics; ERO resources are underlined. Overall, 89% of trustees had used one or more NZSTA resource, 57% had used one or more Ministry of Education resource and 41% one or more ERO resource.

TABLE 38 **Trustees' use of written resources in past 12 months**

Most used	STANews (70%) STA email memos (43%)
38–26% use	Trusteeship Trustee handbook <i>Working in partnership</i> <i>How boards work</i> Hautū tool
22–16%	NZQA Internet material Material on good governance from beyond education <u>ERO indicators</u> <u>ERO national reports on secondary education</u> <i>Effective governance: supporting education success as Māori</i> Guidelines for principal appointment Bullying prevention and response
12–11%	<i>Effective governance: building inclusive schools</i> <i>Effective governance: supporting Pasifika success</i> <u>School trustees: Helping you ask the right questions.</u> NZQA annual reports <u>Wellbeing guidelines</u>

Interestingly, while student behaviour was not identified as a major issue facing their school by decile 9–10 trustees (see Table 13, *Chapter 5: Supporting students' wellbeing*), use of the wellbeing guidelines and bullying prevention and response report was highest among this group (28% and 38% respectively).

A higher proportion of board chairs than other trustees had read these resources: STA email memos (54%), Hautū tool (31%), ERO national reports on secondary education (27%), material on good

governance in other sectors (26%), Bullying prevention and response (23%) and Guidelines for principal appointment (23%).

Changes to the trustee role

Would trustees like to change anything about their role? Only 6% sought no change. More funding for their school topped the list (but at a much lower proportion than in 2009 when it was 82%; in 2012 it was 57%), followed by improvements in their knowledge or training. A related theme was the desire for more guidance and support, on matters beyond those that are NZSTA's responsibility. Another theme was matching time and expectations to what can be achieved. Both are about wanting to make the trustee role more effective.

As with trustees' responses to other questions in this survey, we see a wide range of perspectives, reflecting differences in school and personal situations.

TABLE 39 Main changes trustees would make in their role

Change	(n = 232) %
More funding for the school	55
Improve my knowledge or training	35
Work more with other schools	29
Reduce Ministry expectations of what we can provide for the funding we get	28
More advice about modern learning environments	27
More time to focus on strategic issues	26
More support from parents and whānau	23
More guidance on how to use achievement data to inform board decision making	23
More support/advice from independent education experts	22
More support/advice from Ministry of Education	19
Clearer distinction between governance and management	18
Reduce community expectations of what we can provide for the funding we get	18
More remuneration	18
Better information from school staff to inform our decisions	17
Clearer guidelines to make disciplinary decisions	15
Better communication between board members	11
Reduce workload/paperwork	11
Reduce role in disciplinary decisions	9
Reduce expectations for community consultation	5
More support/advice from NZSTA	5

The pattern here has remained largely consistent since 2009, with the exception of reduced emphasis on more funding, and a reduced emphasis on reducing Ministry of Education expectations (42% of trustees wanted this in 2009, decreasing to 28% in 2012).

A higher proportion of board chairs were interested in having more time to focus on strategic issues (34%, compared with 16% of other trustees). A higher proportion of trustees who were not board chairs were interested in improving their knowledge or training (44%, compared with 29% of board chairs), in having more support from parents and whānau (30%, compared with 18%), more guidance on how to use achievement data to inform board decision making (30%, compared with 18%) and better communication between board members (17%, compared with 7%).

Decile 1–2 school trustees were the most interested in changes: 63% wanted to improve their knowledge or training, 56% to have more support from parents and whānau, 41% to have more guidance on how to use achievement data to inform board decision making, 37% to have better information from school staff to inform decisions,⁶⁴ 26% to have better communication between board members and 15% more support/advice from NZSTA.

Rural trustees showed more interest in changes that would improve their knowledge and training (50%), and give them better information from school staff (43%). They and town trustees were also more interested in having support from independent experts (29% and 35% respectively), and more support from parents and whānau (29% and 37% respectively). Town trustees were more interested in reducing Ministry of Education expectations of them (40%).

Forty percent of trustees intended standing again at the next BoT election (for many schools, in May 2016), and a further 28% were unsure. Overall, the picture of interest in continuing in the role was much the same as in 2012 and 2009.

Summary and discussion

Secondary school BoTs drew on parents and others who are motivated primarily by wanting to contribute to their community. Many bring with them other governance experience, through serving on primary school boards, NGOs or business boards. As a group, they have a high qualification level. Almost all are in paid employment. A significant minority can use or give themselves some support from their employment for their trustee role.

While just over half the trustees spent less than 2 hours a week on their role, a third of the board chairs gave at least 6 hours a week to their role. A higher proportion of board chairs thought the amount of responsibility asked of school boards was too much (29%, compared with 16% of other trustees). Thirty-one percent of principals also thought too much was asked of boards.

Trustees, parents and principals all identified that the main key element in the role of boards is to provide strategic direction for the school, followed by supporting the school staff or principal. Only a minority of trustees and parents thought that the key elements included overseeing the school principal, or representing the government interest.

Consistent with the main focus on strategic direction, student progress and achievement topped the list of the things boards generally spent their time on, followed by financial management and property/maintenance. Most principals reported that their board's decisions supported the school's strategic plan, that the board regularly scrutinised school performance and asked good questions related to school goals, with achievement data playing a key role in board decision making about staffing and resources.

⁶⁴ Decile 3–4 school trustees also showed more interest than others, 29%; decile 9–10 trustees showed least interest in getting better information from school staff, 5%.

Most boards consulted with their school community over the year, through a range of means. More parents felt genuinely consulted by their school board in 2015 than previously. Student achievement and reporting to and working with parents and whānau were the main topics of consultation in what is a wide-ranging set of topics, indicating that each school's consultation with its community is quite contextual.

Parents also raised issues themselves with most of the trustees' boards. These issues are also wide ranging, with student behaviour and dissatisfaction the most common issues, and raised more in 2015 than previously.

Most trustees and principals are positive about how well their school board is doing, with only 6% of trustees and 12% of principals seeing their board as coping or struggling.

Most principals see their school board as adding real value to the school, and focusing on the issues that matter. Relationships are largely productive between the school's professional leader and board chair. However, around a third saw their board as needing a lot of support from the school staff.

Twenty-three percent of the trustees said their board had all the expertise it needed. Experience or skills that were lacking ranged widely, again indicating particular local contexts and board composition. More trustees in 2015 than in 2012 mentioned a lack of expertise in strategic planning, community consultation, understanding achievement data, links with local employers and property (between 16–20% in 2015, and 11–15% in 2012). Financial expertise continues to be most mentioned (23%), along with links with local iwi (22%) and legal expertise (21%).

Trustees reported internal support and information for their role from the principal and other school staff, and each other. They also used written resources from NZSTA (89%), the Ministry of Education (57%) and ERO (51%).

Most had had some form of professional development for their trustee role over the past year, mainly through NZSTA-provided and largely government-funded workshops and courses (62%), and through their own paid work (41%). Around a third had also had advice from NZSTA, ERO and the regional office of the Ministry of Education. Almost all who had had some external professional development or advice for their role saw a positive impact in terms of understanding their responsibilities and, for a minority, in terms of important decisions they needed to make.

Many trustees would like to improve their effectiveness, and the main changes they sought were for more guidance and support on matters beyond NZSTA's role, and a better match of time and expectations to what they can achieve.

While there are many school-specific differences evident in trustee responses, school socioeconomic decile persists as a factor associated with some marked differences in the confidence and capability of boards, and the issues they are faced with. Rural school boards also seem to have some gaps in their confidence and capability.