



# Pacific Education Fono *First findings*

**Talofa lava, Malo e lelei,  
Ni sa bula vinaka,  
Namaste, Kia orana,  
Talofa ni, Fakaalofa lahi  
atu, Kia ora.**

We want to express our gratitude to all the parents, teachers, young people and communities who shared their ideas and opinions at our recent fono across the country.

We heard from around 2,000 people on a wide range of issues and opportunities in education and beyond. We hosted eight education fono in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, Oamaru and Dunedin, as well as a series of smaller fono across Auckland.

We received over 7,000 comments from participants. A team is working to bring out all the key themes and messages you have shared. A final report will then be published.



## Culture & identity

Identity, language and culture need to be reflected in the curriculum. Pacific stories, Pacific history and Pacific role models should be part of the curriculum.

Identity, language and culture should be business as usual - more visible and valued. Some ideas include:

- Having language classes in schools
- Using technology to support young people and teachers to use and learn Pacific languages
- Cultural uniforms
- Pacific advisors to support school staff
- Pacific people in leadership
- Dedicated resources to support stronger focus on Pacific stories in the curriculum

**“You can be in the best school but if your cultural background, values and family is not able to identify, then that will impact on learning. This leads to pressure to be part of a different (Pākehā) identity in order to be able to feel like you’re part of the school community. It’s better “to be part of the walls” because you don’t feel safe enough to make mistakes and to be who you are. You just focus on moulding yourself to become part of the norm.”**

## Bias & racism

Bias and racism exist throughout the system. Pacific identity, language and culture needs to be valued at a system level: resource language support, national language policy, teacher aides who act as cultural advisors for teachers, distinguish between Pacific ethnicities.

Utilise parents and communities to support schools to build cultural competence.

**“Stop institutional racism and bias! We as Pacific are successful. Value us and our children.”**

**“Racism is rife in the education system in New Zealand. Let’s call it what it is.”**

**“Pacific Island students want a system that’s not racist... some Palagi teachers exclude Pacific Island students from opportunities because they are not able to identify and recognise their potential. They are biased.”**

## Access

Services are available to Pacific communities but they often don’t feel confident to access these. There needs to be a focus on accessibility.

Free education is not free – cost of uniforms, school lunches, internet and devices for learning. If Pacific communities do not have access to technology and devices then they will be disadvantaged in education and work – the digital divide.

## Teaching & learning

More Pacific teachers would help sustain the culture, language and identity of Pacific students.

Teachers must know students in all ways – learning styles, strengths, struggles, culture, language and interests and use these to make learning safer, relevant and interesting.

Teachers should have access to professional development and initial teacher education that builds cultural awareness.

## Children & young people

**“What makes me excited about learning is trying new things. I’ve learnt that being afraid of trying new things doesn’t help me with my thinking and it doesn’t help me with my future.”**

**“It’s about my parents and family being included in my education. It must be a safe place, otherwise I won’t bring my parents or family in. The system prevents them from coming in.”**

**“Sometimes it’s hard to talk to your parents, especially when you’re failing. Even if you’re trying hard, parents still blame friends, even when your friends help you.”**

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## Parents & communities

A vision, not only for families to be supporting their child's learning, but to be learning alongside their children with the involvement of the school, the family, the church and the wider community. There is a strong emphasis on the communal nature of learning. It is a process that happens in and out of school with the involvement of the whole community. Young people and their families see the church as a critical part of this.

Learning starts and continues at home and parents want to be involved in the whole learning journey of their child. There is a growing demand from parents to be supported to be involved, to question school decisions if needed and to advocate for the best for their children.

Schools should fit with the family, not the family with the school. This could mean meeting in a local church to engage with the community. It is a community conversation, rather than a single family.

**“How do we enable all parents to have confidence to speak up and sometimes challenge the views of teachers and principals? Suggest that we come together as Pacific parents. We share voices, shared food, work on a vision for education together then share it with the school.”**

## Wellbeing

Wellbeing for Pacific communities is not about the child, it is about the family. It starts with the family and is strongly collective in nature.

The roles, responsibilities and high expectations on Pacific young people in their communities is both a source of motivation and a source of pressure that can negatively affect wellbeing. There is a desire for better and more open communication about some of the unique pressures Pacific young people face and how this impacts mental health and wellbeing.

When it comes to learning, there is a need to prioritise things that contribute to strong wellbeing, health and safety – healthy food, good relationships, feeling physically, culturally, emotionally safe in and outside of the school and the home. Learning is negatively impacted when these things are not in place.

Cultural identity is intertwined with wellbeing. The pressure of working out where and how you belong, of having to ‘walk in two worlds’ places extra pressure on Pacific children and young people. There is also concern about the negative impact of technology and social media on mental health.

**“We understand health, wellbeing and safety from a Pasifika point of view but the Ministry / education system does not... It starts with the family – the core of everything. It doesn't just start with the child that turns up at school”**

## Success

Success is largely about relationships, having strong relationships and giving back to your community and to those in need.

It involves knowing who you are and where you come from and having a strong cultural identity

There is a need for more visible and celebrated Pacific role models. This is hugely important for communities to visualise success and have something to aspire to.

**“Have high expectations for our children. They can and will be anything they want to be.”**

**“Just because Pacific communities have a ‘lack of things doesn't mean they're not valuable and resilient”**

## Knowledge

Importance of lifelong learning skills such as empathy, resilience, assertiveness, leadership, communication and building strong relationships. These skills will better prepare Pacific children and young people for the changing world of work.

Focus on life skills like budgeting, cooking, financial literacy, managing a mortgage, voting and politics, literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy.

Strong emphasis on having meaningful work that provides financial stability and opportunities for Pacific people.

## Keeping up to date with Pacific education

We want to make sure that all of you who participated in the fono, or who are interested in what our Pacific communities have said, are kept up to date.

For more information on Pacific education got to <https://conversation.education.govt.nz>

To go on our mailing list to receive alerts about changes in Pacific education, please email us at [pacific.educationsummits@education.govt.nz](mailto:pacific.educationsummits@education.govt.nz).

